ESSAY

ON THE

CHARACTER,

MANNERS, and GENIUS

OF

WOMEN

IN DIFFERENT AGES.

Enlarged from the French of M. THOMAS,

By Mr. RUSSELL.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

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CONTENTS.

Sect. V. *Of the Comparative Merit of the two Sexes,* Page 1

VI. *Of the Decline of ſerious Gallantry, and of the Progreſs of Society in France,* 68

VII. *Of the Progreſs of Society in Britain, and of the Character, Manners, and Talents of the Britiſh Women,* 107

VIII. *The Concluſion,* 174

ESSAY

ON THE

CHARACTER, MANNERS, and GENIUS

OF

WOMEN.

PART II.

SECTION V.

Of the comparative Merit of the two Sexes.

TO determine this grand queſtion of ſelf-love and rivalry between the ſexes, it would be neceſſary to examine the ſtrength or weakneſs of their or-

gans; the education of which they are capable; the end of nature in forming them; how far it is poſſible to correct or to change her purpoſe; which would gain, and which would loſe by departing from her; and, in ſhort, to mark particularly the influence which the difference of duties, of occupations, and of manners, muſt unavoidably have on the genius, on the ſentiments, and on the character of the two ſexes.

In comparing the intellectual powers of the ſexes, it would be neceſſary to conſider diſtinctly the philoſophical talent, which meditates; the talent of memory, which collects; the talent of imagination, which creates; the moral

ral and political talent, which governs.

It would further be neceſſary to inquire, to what degree women poſſeſs theſe four kinds of genius: If the natural weakneſs of their organs, which is the cauſe of their beauty; if the inquietude of their character, which ariſes from their imagination; if the multitude and the variety of their ſenſations, which are numbered among their charms, may not deprive them of that vigorous and continued attention which is requiſite to connect a numerous train of ideas—an attention, which excludes all other objects, to view and contemplate one; which out of a ſingle idea produces a multitude, all chained to the firſt; or which, out

of a number of ſcattered ideas, ſelects one primitive and vaſt idea which combines all the reſt.

This philoſophical ſpirit is rare, indeed, even among men; but ſtill there are many great men who have poſſeſſed it—who have raiſed themſelves to the height of nature to become acquainted with her works; who have ſhewn to the ſoul the ſource of its ideas; who have aſſigned to reaſon its bounds, to motion its laws, and to the univerſe its harmony; who have created ſciences in creating principles, and who have aggrandiſed the human mind in cultivating their own. If there is no woman found on a level with thoſe illuſtrious men, is it the fault of education, or of nature?

Deſ-

Deſcartes, abuſed by envious men, but admired by two generous princeſſes, boaſted of the philoſophical talents of women. I am far however from thinking that his gratitude could lead him into a voluntary error, even in compliment to beauty. He would no doubt find in Elizabeth and in Chriſtina a docility which prided itſelf in liſtening to ſo great a man, and which ſeemed to aſſociate itſelf with his genius in following the range of his ideas. He might perhaps even find in the compoſitions of women perſpicuity, order, and method; but did he find that ſtrong diſcernment, that depth of intellect, that diffidence which characteriſes the real philoſopher?—Did he find that cool rea-

ſon which, always inquiſitive, advances ſlowly, and remeaſures all its ſteps?—Their genius, penetrating and rapid, flies off,—and is at reſt. They have more ſallies than efforts. What they do not ſee at once, they either cannot ſee at all, or they diſdain, or they deſpair to ſee. It is therefore little wonder they ſhould want that unremitted aſſiduity, which alone can purſue and diſcover important truths.

Imagination might ſeem rather to be their province.

It has been obſerved, that the imagination of women has in it ſomething unaccountably ſingular and extraordinary. All things

ſtrike

ſtrike it; all things paint themſelves on it in a lively manner. Their volatile ſenſes embrace every object, and carry off its image. Some unknown powers, ſome ſecret ſympathies enable them rapidly to ſeize the impreſſions. The material world is not ſufficient for them: they love to create an ideal world of their own; which they embelliſh, and in which they dwell. Spectres, enchantments, prodigies—whatever tranſcends the ordinary laws of nature, is their creation, and their delight. They enjoy even their terrors. Their feelings are fine, and their fancy always approaches to enthuſiaſm.

But it would be neceſſary to inquire, how far that fancy, when

applied to the arts, can unfold itſelf in the talent of creating and of painting: if their imagination is as vigorous, as it is lively and verſatile; if it does not unavoidably partake of their occupations, of their pleaſures, of their taſtes, and even of their weakneſſes. I ſuſpect that their delicate fibres are afraid of ſtrong ſenſations, which fatigue them, and that they ſeek the ſoft, on which they may repoſe.

Man, always active, is expoſed to ſtorms. The imagination of the poet enjoys itſelf on the ridge of mountains, on the brink of volcanoes, in the middle of ruins, on ſeas, and on fields of battle; and it is never more ſuſceptible of voluptuous and tender ideas, than after having experienced ſome great emotion.

But

But women, by means of their delicate and ſedentary life, leſs acquainted with the contraſt of the gentle and the terrible, may be ſuppoſed to feel and to paint leſs perfectly, even the agreeable ſenſations, than thoſe who, thrown into oppoſite conditions, paſs rapidly from the one ſentiment to the other. Perhaps too, from the habit of reſigning themſelves to the impreſſion of the moment, which with them is very ſtrong, their minds muſt be more repleniſhed with images than pictures:— or perhaps their imagination, though lively, may be compared to a mirror, which reflects fairly, magnifies, multiplies, diſtorts, or diminiſhes, like their good-humour, their hopes, their fears,

their

their jealouſies, their envies, the forms of all things, but creates nothing.

Love is without diſpute the paſſion which the women feel the ſtrongeſt, and which they expreſs the beſt. They feel the other paſſions more feebly, and by rebound: but love is their own; it is the charm and the buſineſs of their life; it is their ſoul. They ſhould therefore know well how to paint it.

But do they know, like the author of Othello, of The Revenge, or of Zara, to expreſs the tranſports of a troubled ſoul, which joins fury to love; which is ſometimes impetuous, and ſometimes tender;

tender; which now is ſoftened, and now is rouſed; which ſheds blood, and which ſacrifices itſelf? Can they paint theſe doublings of the human heart, theſe ſtorms of emotion and paſſion?—No: nature herſelf reſtrains them. She has given to one of the ſexes bold deſires, and the right of attack; to the other ſhe has aſſigned the province of defence, and timid deſires, which attract by reſiſting. Love in the one ſex is a conqueſt, in the other a ſacrifice.

It therefore follows, that the women of all countries, and in all ages, muſt have known better how to paint a delicate and tender ſentiment, than a violent and turbulent paſſion. Obliged, in ſhort,

by their duty, by the reſerve of their ſex, by the deſire of a certain charm, which is more bewitching than wit, and more attractive than beauty, always to conceal a part of their ſentiments,—muſt not theſe ſentiments, by being continually conſtrained, become weaker by degrees, and have leſs energy than thoſe of men, who, at all times, bold and extravagant with impunity, give to their paſſions what tone they pleaſe, and which are invigorated by exerciſe ?

A temporary conſtraint inflames the paſſions ; but a continued conſtraint cools or extinguiſhes them.

With regard to the talent of order and memory, which claſſes facts,

facts, and ideas when neceſſary, as it depends a good deal upon method and habit, there ſeems little reaſon why the two ſexes may not poſſeſs it in an equal degree. Yet it would ſtill be neceſſary to examine, if the women would not be deficient in the quantity of materials, which are ſo eſſential to erudition; if exceſſive application would not more eaſily diſguſt them. Is it not true, that their impatience and natural deſire of change, which ariſe from fleeting and rapid impreſſions, prevent them from following for a courſe of years the ſame kind of ſtudy, and conſequently from acquiring profound or extenſive knowledge? We are ſenſible they have qualities of mind which atone for it. It is

not

not the ſame hand which poliſhes the diamond, and which digs the mine.

We come now to a more important object, the moral and political talent; which conſiſts in the regulating of ourſelves and of others. To compare the advantages and diſadvantages of the two ſexes with regard to this object, it would be neceſſary to obſerve the ſame talent in ſociety, and when applied to government.

The women in ſociety, by being continually upon the look-out, from the double motive of curioſity and of policy, muſt have a perfect knowledge of men. They muſt be able to diſentangle all the folds of

of ſelf-love; to diſcover the ſecret weakneſſes, the falſe modeſties, and the falſe grandeurs; what a man is, and what he would be; the qualities which he ſhews, even by an effort to conceal them; his eſteem marked even in his ſatires, and by his ſatires themſelves. They muſt know and diſtinguiſh characters:—the cool pride, which enjoys itſelf in ſtate; the warm and impetuous pride, which is eaſily inflamed; the vain ſenſibility, the tender ſenſibility, the ſenſibility which is veiled under an appearance of indifference; the pretended levity, and the levity of the heart; the diffidence which proceeds from character, from vice, from misfortune, or from the mind; in ſhort, all the ſentiments, and all their ſhades.

As

As women ſet a high value on opinion, they muſt reflect much upon what can produce it, deſtroy it, or confirm it. They muſt know how far one may direct, without appearing to be intereſted; how far one may preſume upon that art, even after it is known; in what eſtimation they are held by thoſe with whom they live, and to what degree it is neceſſary to ſerve them that they may govern them.

In all matters of buſineſs women know the great effects which are produced by little cauſes. They have the art of impoſing upon ſome, by ſeeming to diſcover to them what they already know; of diverting others from their pur-

purpoſe, by confirming their moſt diſtant ſuſpicions. They know how to captivate by praiſes, thoſe who merit them; and to raiſe a bluſh, by beſtowing them where they are not due.

Theſe delicate ſciences are the leading-ſtrings in which the women conduct the men. Society to them is like a harpſichord, of which they know the touches: they can divine the ſound which every one will produce. But the men, bold and free, ſupplying addreſs by force, conſequently having leſs call for obſervation, and hurried along beſides by the continual neceſſity of acting, can ſcarcely be poſſeſſed of that crowd of little notices and polite atten-

tions, which are every moment neceſſary in the commerce of life: their calculations therefore on ſociety muſt be more ſlow, and leſs ſure, than thoſe of women.

It would afterwards be neceſſary to compare the genius of the two ſexes, as applied to government.

In ſociety men are governed by their paſſions, and the leaſt motives often produce the greateſt conſequences. But, in the government of ſtates, it is by comprehenſive views, by the choice of principles, and, above all, by the diſcovery and the employment of talents, that ſucceſs can be obtained. Here, inſtead of taking advantage of foibles, we muſt fear them;

them; we muſt raiſe men above their weakneſſes, not lead them into them.

The art of governing in ſociety may therefore be ſaid to conſiſt in flattering vice and folly with addreſs; and the art of adminiſtration, in combatting them with judgment. The knowledge of mankind required in the two caſes is very different: In the one, they muſt be known by their weakneſs; in the other, by their ſtrength. The one takes part with failings, for little ends; the other diſcovers great qualities, which are mingled with thoſe very faults. The one, in ſhort, ſeeks little blemiſhes in great men; and the other, in diſſecting great men,

muſt often perceive the ſame ſpots: for perfect characters exiſt only in Utopia.

Let us now examine, if this kind of genius and obſervation agrees equally with the character of the two ſexes. I know that there are women who have reigned, and who ſtill reign with luſtre. Chriſtina in Sweden, Iſabella of Caſtile in Spain, and Elizabeth in England, have merited the eſteem of their age, and of poſterity. We ſaw, in the war of 1741, a princeſs, whom even her enemies admired, defend the German empire with no leſs genius than courage; and we behold, at this day, the Ottoman empire ſhaken by a woman. But, in general queſtions,

we

we ſhould beware of taking exceptions for rules; we ought to attend only to the ordinary courſe of nature.

It therefore becomes neceſſary to inquire, if in ſociety the women being leſs engaged in action, and in general leſs fit for it, can know ſo well as the other ſex, the talents of men, their uſe, or their extent; if great views, and the application of great principles, including the habit of ſeizing at a glance the reſult of things, correſpond not ill with the prolixity of their imagination, or at leaſt with the arrangement of their ideas. It is character chiefly which governs; it is the vigour of the ſoul which gives impulſe to genius, which

ſtrengthens and extends political capacity. But this character is ſeldom formed but by great commotions; by great hopes, by great fears, and by the neceſſity of being continually engaged in action. Is not then the character of women in general, better calculated for elegance than for ſway?—for attraction than for command?—Does not their rapid imagination, which often makes ſentiment precede thought, render them more ſuſceptible of prejudice or of error in the choice of men?——Would not one be in danger of abuſe, would not one even run the riſk of their diſpleaſure, if he ſhould ſay, that in the diſtribution of their eſteem they would ſet too high a value upon external accompliſhments;

and,

and, in ſhort, that they would perhaps be too eaſily lead to believe, that an agreeable man was a great man?—

Yet Elizabeth was not free from this cenſure. The inclinations of her ſex ſtole beneath the cares of the throne, and the grandeur of her character. We are chagrined at certain times, to ſee the little weakneſſes of a woman mingle with the views of a great mind. If Mary queen of Scotland had been leſs fair, perhaps her rival had been leſs cruel. This taſte for coquetry, as is well known, furniſhed Elizabeth with favourites; in the choice of which ſhe judged more like a woman than a ſovereign. She was always too ready

to believe, that the power of pleaſing her implied genius.

That ſo much celebrated queen exerciſed over England an almoſt arbitary ſway; at which perhaps we ought not to be ſurpriſed. Women in general on the throne are more inclined to deſpotiſm, and more impatient of reſtraint than men. The ſex to whom nature has aſſigned power by giving them ſtrength, have a certain confidence which raiſes them in their own eyes; ſo that they have no need of manifeſting to themſelves that ſuperiority of which they are ſure. But weakneſs, aſtoniſhed at the ſway which ſhe poſſeſſes, ſhakes her ſceptre on every ſide, to eſtabliſh her dominion.

Great

Great men are perhaps more carried to that ſpecies of deſpotiſm which ariſes from lofty ideas; and women, above the ordinary claſs, to the deſpotiſm which proceeds from paſſion. The laſt is rather a ſally of the heart, than the effect of ſyſtem.

One thing which favours the deſpotiſm of female ſovereigns is, that the men confound the empire of their ſex with that of their rank. What we refuſe to grandeur, we pay to beauty. But the dominion of women, even when arbitrary, is ſeldom cruel. Theirs is rather a deſpotiſm of caprice, than of oppreſſion. The throne itſelf cannot cure their ſenſibility; they carry in their boſoms

ſoms the counterpoiſe of their power*.

If, after having compared the talents of the two ſexes, we ſhould compare their virtues, we would receive very different informations.

Both experience and hiſtory atteſt, that in all ſects, in all countries, and in all ranks, the women have more religious virtues than the men. Naturally poſſeſſed of more ſenſibility, they have more need of an object that may unceaſingly occupy their ſouls; they offer to God a ſentiment which

* Hence it follows, that in limited monarchies female ſovereigns will tend to deſpotiſm from their jealouſy; and, in abſolute governments, will approach to monarchy by their mildneſs. This obſervation is proved by experience.

they cannot contain, and which otherwiſe would be a crime. Greedy of happineſs, and not finding enough in this world, they launch into a life and a world abounding with ineffable delights. Extreme in their deſires, nothing limited can ſatisfy them.—More flexible in their duties than men, they reaſon leſs, and feel more. More ſubjected to good opinion, they pay more attention to what concerns themſelves. Leſs occupied, and leſs active, they have more time for contemplation. Leſs abſtracted or abſent, they are more ſtrongly affected by the ſame idea, becauſe they ſee it continually. More ſtruck by external objects, they reliſh more the pageantry of ceremonies and of temples; and

the

the devotion of the ſenſes has no inconſiderable effect on that of the ſoul. Confined, in ſhort, on all hands, denied the effuſion of their ſentiments to men by the reſerve of their ſex, to women by an eternal rivalry, they may at leaſt talk of their pleaſures and their pains to the great Being who knows them, and they often pour into his boſom many dear weakneſſes of which the world are ignorant. In ſo doing they recall their beloved errors, they enjoy even their ſorrow, without reproaching themſelves; and afflicted, yet free from remorſe, becauſe under the eye of a benevolent Deity, they find ſecret delights in repenting, and in combatting their warmeſt wiſhes.

It ſhould ſeem therefore, in conſequence of the character of women, that their religion muſt be more tender, and that of men more ſevere, the one conſiſting more in practice, the other in principles; and, in exalting their religious ideas, that the woman is more liable to ſuperſtition, the man to fanaticiſm. But, if once fanaticiſm catch hold of the woman, her more lively imagination will carry her a greater length; and, more auſtere even from the dread of ſenſibility, what was formerly a part of her charms, will only contribute to increaſe her fury.

The domeſtic virtues are intimately connected with thoſe of religion. They are doubtleſs com-

mon to both ſexes: but the advantage ſeems ſtill to be in favour of the women. At leaſt they have more need of virtues which they have more occaſion to practice.

In the firſt period of life, timid, and without ſupport, the girl is more attached to her mother: by ſeldom leaving her, ſhe comes to love her more. The trembling innocent is cheared by the preſence of her protectreſs; and her weakneſs, while it heightens her beauty, augments her ſenſibility. Become mother, ſhe has other duties, which all things invite her to fulfil. Then the condition of the two ſexes is widely different.

Man, in the middle of his labours, and among his arts, employing

ploying his powers, and commanding nature, finds a pleaſure in his induſtry, in his ſucceſs, and even in his toils. But woman, more ſolitary, and leſs active, has fewer reſources: her pleaſures muſt ariſe from her virtues; her amuſements are her family. It is by the cradle of her child—it is in viewing the ſmiles of her daughter, or the ſports of her ſon, that a mother is happy.

And where are the bowels, the cries, the powerful emotions of nature?—Where is the ſentiment, at once ſublime and pathetic, that carries every feeling to exceſs?—is it to be found in the froſty indifference, and the ſour ſeverity of ſo many fathers?—No; but in the

warm and paſſionate boſom of a mother. It is ſhe, who by an impulſe, as quick as involuntary, ruſhes into the flood to preſerve a boy, whoſe imprudence had betrayed him to the waves. It is ſhe, who, in the middle of a conflagration, throws herſelf acroſs the flames to ſave a ſleeping infant. It is ſhe, who with diſhevelled locks, pale, diſtracted, embraces with tranſport the body of a dead child, preſſing its cold lips to hers, as if ſhe would reanimate by her tears and her careſſes the inſenſible clay.

Theſe great expreſſions of nature, theſe heart-rending emotions, which fill us at once with wonder, compaſſion, and terror, always have belonged, and always will belong,

belong, only to women. They poſſeſs in thoſe moments an inexpreſſible ſomething, which carries them beyond themſelves; they ſeem to diſcover to us new ſouls, above the ſtandard of humanity.

If we conſider even the matrimonial duties, the obligations of huſband and wife; which of the two ſexes is moſt likely to be faithful?—which, in violating them, has moſt obſtacles to encounter?—Is not woman beſt defended by her education, by her reſerve, by that modeſty which ſilences even her deſires, and ſometimes diſputes the rights of the moſt tender love?—To theſe reſtraints we may add, the power of the firſt paſſion and the firſt ties over a heart endowed

with ſenſibility, and which had formerly been forbid to love; the force of opinion, which reigns ſo deſpotically over the women, and which, tyrant-like, applauds often the ſame weakneſſes in the one ſex, for which it devotes the other to infamy.

Nature herſelf, attentive in this inſtance to the manners of women, has taken care to ſurround them with the ſtrongeſt, yet the gentleſt barriers. She has made inconſtancy more painful, and fidelity more pleaſing to their hearts:—and it muſt be owned, that they have ſeldom begun the diſorders of families. Even in ages of general corruption, conjugal infidelity in women has been one of the laſt of crimes.

After the religious and domeſtic virtues come the ſocial virtues; and firſt the virtues of ſenſibility, or the ſweet and affectionate paſſions. The chief of theſe are friendſhip and love.

It has long been a queſtion, which of the two ſexes is moſt capable of friendſhip. Montaigne, who is ſo much celebrated for his knowledge of human nature, has given it poſitively againſt the women; and his opinion has been generally embraced: but he appears to have judged too haſtily on this ſubject. Through his whole Eſſays, indeed, he has done too little juſtice to the gentle ſex. Perhaps — for we cannot accuſe him of inſenſibility—he was like

that judge who, conſcious of his own weakneſs, was ſo much afraid of being partial, that he decided every cauſe againſt his friends.

If I were to converſe with Montaigne on this ſubject, I would ſay to him,

" You undoubtedly agree, that " friendſhip is the ſentiment of " two ſouls, which ſeek and which " have need of the ſupport of each " other. Now it ſhould ſeem, that " the ſex whoſe head and hands are " moſt occupied; which is moſt " independent; which is moſt free; " which has the greateſt ability of " expanding its ideas, and of em- " ploying its ſentiments; which " in proſperity is better ſupported

" by

" by pride; which in adverſity is
" more humbled than afflicted;
" which in all conditions has a
" conſciouſneſs of its powers, and
" which glories in them—it ſhould
" ſeem that man could more eaſily
" diſpenſe with the commerce, and
" the ſweet effuſions of friendſhip.
" But woman, delicate and feeble,
" and on that account having more
" need of ſupport; in herſelf more
" ſubject to chagrin, to private
" griefs, and to that ſorrow of
" heart which finds more relief in
" ſenſibility than pride; in the
" world, obliged almoſt always to
" play a part, and to carry along
" with her a load of ſenſations and
" of ideas, which ſhe hides, and
" which oppreſs her—woman, in
" ſhort, to whom externals are

 " nothing,

" nothing, and her feelings every
" thing; woman, in whom every
" thing produces a ſentiment, to
" whom indifference is violence,
" and who knows almoſt only to
" love and to hate, muſt feel more
" exquiſitely the liberty and the
" pleaſure of a ſecret commerce,
" and the tender confidence which
" friendſhip gives and receives."

Montaigne would not fail to reply,

" You judge of women accord-
" ing to nature; judge of them
" likewiſe according to ſociety,
" as they exiſt in the world, and
" particularly in great cities. Ex-
" amine if their general deſire to
" pleaſe, a ſentiment more ſlight

" than deep, and more vain than
" tender, has not withered their
" hearts, and in a great meaſure
" blaſted ſenſibility itſelf; if, in-
" toxicated with eternal flattery,
" and accuſtomed to the ſweeteſt
" dominion, they could ſubmit
" to continual ſacrifices, and to
" that happy equality which friend-
" ſhip impoſes; if, in ſhort, in
" their friendſhip with us, they
" would not have too much re-
" ſerve:—and how contemptible
" is a friendſhip which is on its
" guard, where the ſentiments are
" always covered with a ſlender
" veil, and where the naked heart
" is never ſeen!

" I ſpeak not of their friendſhip
" between themſelves: there was

" no ſuch thing known in my
" time; and, I ſuppoſe, it is the
" ſame in yours. But I ſhould be
" glad to know how they can love,
" or repoſe confidence in each other,
" in a world where they are con-
" tinually compared, and are con-
" tinually comparing themſelves;
" where their attachments divide
" them; where their pretenſions
" interfere; where they are rivals
" in rank, in beauty, in fortune,
" in wit, in their talent for ſociety,
" and in their ſocieties themſelves:
" for ſelf-love always calculating,
" always meaſuring, views all
" things, is offended at all things,
" and is foſtered even by what of-
" fends it.

" No!"—Montaigne might add,
" Friendſhip does not conſiſt in
" empty

" empty ſhow, in jargon, in vain
" phraſes, more ridiculous even in
" their motive than their mean-
" ing. It is a ſentiment which re-
" quires energy of ſoul, and a ſo-
" lidity of mind as well as of cha-
" racter; it is a ſacred and almoſt a
" holy union, which by a devotion
" peculiar to itſelf, conſecrates a
" heart entirely to a heart; it is a
" paſſion which transforms two
" wills into one, and gives to two
" beings the ſame life and the ſame
" ſoul.

" Friendſhip is bold and ſevere:
" for, properly to fulfil its duties,
" it muſt be able to ſpeak and to
" hear the harſh and ungrateful
" language of truth. It muſt poſ-
" ſeſs a courage, which is neither

" alarmed

" alarmed at ſacrifices nor at dan-
" gers: and it demands, above
" all things, that unity of character
" which, from the variety and the
" eternal fluctuation of their paſ-
" ſions, we ſeldom find in wo-
" men, and which only can enable
" us to feel, to think, and to act
" as a friend, at all times, and upon
" all occaſions.

" What do I ſay? — Are not
" friends more ſtrongly aſſociated
" by great intereſts, and by great
" trials? — But women, by their
" condition, are deſtined to re-
" poſe. Nature has formed them,
" like the flowers, to bloom
" ſweetly on the parterre which
" gives them birth; but the trees,
" produced and reared in the mid-

dle

" dle of ſtorms, and in more dan-
" ger, even from their ſtrength,
" of being broken by the winds,
" have more need of ſupport from
" each other, and they are ſuſ-
" tained by union."

From theſe objections, it may perhaps follow, that friendſhip in women muſt be more rare than among men; but it will alſo be allowed at the ſame time, that it muſt be more delicate and more tender. Men have in general more of the parade than the elegance of friendſhip. They often wound while they ſerve; and their warmeſt ſentiments are not ſufficiently illuminated with thoſe little attentions which are of ſo much value in the intercourſe of ſouls.

ſouls. But women have a ſenſibility which is never abſent, which never forgets or omits any thing. Nothing eſcapes them: they divine the hidden friendſhip; they encourage the baſhful or timid friendſhip, and they offer their ſweeteſt conſolations to friendſhip in diſtreſs. Furniſhed with finer inſtruments, they treat more delicately a wounded heart; they compoſe it, and prevent it from feeling its agonies: and they know, above all things, to give an importance to circumſtances which have none in themſelves. We ought therefore perhaps to deſire the friendſhip of a man upon great occaſions; but, for general happineſs, we muſt prefer the friendſhip of a woman.

Wo-

Women in love have the ſame delicacies and the ſame weakneſſes. Their paſſions are keen: they either love at once, or do not love at all. Men are leſs eaſily inflamed, and by degrees. The paſſions of women, by being more conſtrained, are perhaps more ardent: they are nurſed by ſilence, and rouſed by oppoſition. Fear and modeſty mingle inquietude with love in their gentle hearts, and by exerciſing it, double its force.—When a man is ſure of his conqueſt, his paſſion is tinctured with pride; but a woman is then only more tender. The more her confeſſion has coſt her, the more dearly ſhe loves the man to whom it was made. She attaches herſelf by her ſacrifices. Virtuous

tuous, ſhe enjoys her denials; guilty, ſhe glories in the favours ſhe beſtows.

Women therefore, when love is a paſſion, are more conſtant than men; but, when it is only an appetite, they are more libertine. For then they feel no more thoſe anxieties, thoſe ſtruggles, and that ſweet ſhame, which impreſſed the delicious ſentiment ſo ſtrongly on their hearts. Nothing remains but the ſenſes and imagination: — ſenſes guided by caprice; an imagination waſted by its own ardour, and which is every moment inflamed and extinguiſhed.

After love and friendſhip come benevolence, and that generous com-

compaſſion which intereſts the heart in the misfortunes of others. Theſe are more particularly the portion of women. Every thing inclines them to generoſity and pity. Their delicate ſenſes revolt at the preſence of diſtreſs and pain. Objects of miſery and averſion diſcompoſe the ſoft indolence of their minds. Their ſouls are more hurt by images of ſorrow and of ſpleen than tormented by their own ſenſibility. They muſt therefore be very anxious to afford relief.—They poſſeſs beſides in a high degree, that inſtinctive feeling, which operates without reaſoning; and they often relieve, while men deliberate. Their benevolence is perhaps leſs rational, but it is more active. It is alſo more attentive, and more ten-

tender. What woman has ever been wanting in commiſeration to the unfortunate?

But it would be neceſſary to examine if women, ſo ſuſceptible of friendſhip, of love, of pity, of benevolence to individuals, can elevate themſelves to that patriotiſm, or diſintereſted love of one's country, which embraces all its citizens, and to that philanthropy, or univerſal love of mankind, which embraces all nations.

I would not be thought to undervalue patriotiſm. It is the nobleſt ſentiment of the human mind; at leaſt it is that which has produced the greateſt men, and which gave birth to thoſe ancient

heroes, whoſe hiſtory ſtill aſtoniſhes our imagination, and accuſes our weakneſs. But if we ſhould trace its ſource, and examine in what it conſiſts, we would find that this boaſted virtue is almoſt always a compoſition of pride and ſelfiſhneſs, generated by the ideas of intereſt and property, by the remembrance of paſt ſervices, by the hope of future honours or rewards, and a certain factitious enthuſiaſm which robs men of themſelves, to transform their exiſtence entirely into the body of the ſtate.

Theſe ſentiments, it will readily be perceived, do not correſpond with the condition of women. In almoſt all governments, excluded from honours, and from

offices, they can neither obtain, nor hope to obtain, nor attach themſelves to the ſtate, from the pride of having held a place of eminence. Poſſeſſed of little property, and reſtrained by the laws even in what they have, the form of legiſlation in all countries muſt make them in a great meaſure indifferent to public welfare. Never acting, or fighting for their country, they have not one flattering remembrance to tie them to it, by vanity, by labours, or by virtues. Exiſting, in ſhort, more in themſelves, and in the objects of their ſenſibility, and being perhaps leſs fitted than men by nature for the civil inſtitutions in which they have leſs ſhare, they muſt be leſs ſuſceptible of that en-

thuſiaſm, which makes a man prefer the ſtate to his family, and the collective body of his fellow-citizens to himſelf.

The example of the women of Rome and Sparta, I am ſenſible, may be urged in objection to theſe obſervations; but thoſe ancient republics are not to be compared with our modern eſtabliſhments. The wonders performed by the Dutch women, in the revolution of the Seven Provinces, will likewiſe perhaps be urged. To which I anſwer, that the glorious enthuſiaſm of liberty can do all things; that there are times when nature is aſtoniſhed at herſelf; and that great virtues ſpring from great calamities. But of ſuch there is no reaſoning.

If the love of their country is little ſuited to women, that univerſal love of mankind, which extends to all nations, and to all ages, and which is a kind of abſtract ſentiment, ſeems to correſpond ſtill leſs with their character. They muſt have an image of what they love. It is only by the power of arranging his ideas, that the philoſopher is able to overleap ſo many barriers; to paſs from a man, to a people; from a people, to human kind; from the time in which he lives, to ages yet unborn; and from what he ſees, to what he does not ſee.

The tender ſex do not love to ſend their ſouls ſo far a-wandering. They aſſemble their ſentiments

ments and their ideas about them; and confine their affections to what intereſts them moſt. Thoſe ſtrides of benevolence to women are out of nature. A man to them, is more than a nation; and the hour in which they live, than a thouſand ages after death.

There are certain qualities, which have generally been ranked among the ſocial virtues, but which may more properly be called *the virtues of poliſhed life.* They are the charm, and the bond of company; and are uſeful at all times, and upon all occaſions. They are in the commerce of the world, what current money is in trade: they are ſometimes not abſolutely neceſſary, but one can never ſafely be without them; and

they always procure the poſſeſſor a more favourable reception. Such is that mild complacency, which gives a ſoftneſs to the character, and an attractive ſweetneſs to the manners; that indulgence, which pardons the faults of others, even when it has no need of pardon itſelf; the art of not ſeeing the weakneſſes which diſcover themſelves, and of keeping the ſecret of thoſe who hide it; of concealing our advantages, when we humble our rivals or opponents; of dealing gently with thoſe, who cannot ſubmit without being offended: that facility, which adopts ideas which it never had; that delicate foreſight, which divines the fears of thoſe with whom we converſe, and encourages the diſplay

of

of thought and ſentiment; that freedom, which inſpires confidence; and all that politeneſs, in ſhort, which perhaps is not virtue, —nay, which is ſometimes no more than a happy lie,—but which gives laws to ſelf-love, and makes pride ſit eaſy by the ſide of pride, which would otherwiſe every moment be wounded.

We ſhall not trace the parallel of the ſexes through all theſe ſentiments; but it is neceſſary to obſerve in general, that the women correct that rudeneſs which pride and paſſion introduce into the company of men. Their delicate hand ſmooths the aſperities of human life. Politeneſs is a part of their character; it is connected

with their mind, with their manners, and even with their intereſt. To the moſt virtuous woman ſociety is a field of conqueſt.

Few men have formed the project of making every body happy, and ſo much the worſe for thoſe who have: but many women have not only formed ſuch a ſcheme, but have ſucceeded in it. The more general the intercourſe of the ſexes, the more the talent of pleaſing is perfected; the more general this ſpecies of merit; for then there are more little intereſts to conciliate, and characters to unite. Society becomes a complicated machine, and demands more dexterity to regulate its movements.

* We are, in general, ſo much the more polite, as we are leſs devoted

voted to ourſelves and more to others; as we are more attentive to opinion; as we are more zealous to be diſtinguiſhed; and, perhaps, in proportion as we have fewer reſources and great means of being ſo. But theſe are not all: among individuals and among a people, between the ſexes and between the ranks, politeneſs ſuppoſes a certain degree of idleneſs; for it ſuppoſes the habit and the neceſſity of living together. Hence the art of regulating our behaviour, of adjuſting our looks, our words, and our motions; the need of attentions, and all the little gratifications of vanity. We are naturally inclined to pay that homage which we receive, and to exact that which we pay. Thus

the

the delicacy of ſelf-love produces all the refinements in ſociety; as the delicacy of the ſenſes produces all the refinements in pleaſure; and as the delicacy of taſte, which is perhaps only the reſult of the other two, produces all the refinements in literature, arts, and ſciences.—It will be eaſy to diſcern how theſe objects are connected with one another, and how they are all related to women.

But refined politeneſs, it may be ſaid, is allied to falſhood. It ſubſtitutes the expreſſion of ſentiment too often for ſentiment itſelf. Hence the reproach ſo common againſt women:—and it muſt be owned, that they are by nature more diſpoſed to every kind of diſſi-

diſſimulation than men. Power and independence diſplay all their motions with freedom; but weakneſs and the art of pleaſing, muſt obſerve and meaſure all theirs. The timid ſex therefore learn to hide the ſentiments which they have, and to exhibit thoſe which they have not.

A man may be open without being on that account entitled to praiſe; for he is often ſo without effort, nay from an impetuoſity of ſoul which he cannot reſtrain; but ſincerity in a woman, when real, is never without merit. Men are ſometimes frank by deſign: women ſeldom affect that ſpecies of hypocriſy; and when they do, to pleaſe the better, they

give

give to their frankneſs the air of confidence. It is a ſacrifice which they make to friendſhip.

Men owe their frankneſs to pride, women to addreſs. The one ſex often utters a truth without any other view than truth itſelf; in the mouth of the other, even truth itſelf has an aim. The falſity of man almoſt always regards his intereſt; it is only for himſelf: that of woman generally proceeds from a deſire to pleaſe; ſhe refers every thing to others. The one cheats, the other ſeduces you.

Flattery is common to both ſexes. But the flattery of men is often groſs to a degree that is

baſe: that of women is more light, and has more the appearance of ſentiment. Even when it is over-done, it is generally amuſing, and is never diſguſting. The motive and the manner ſave them from contempt.

To conclude this parallel, (which is already too long) it would be neceſſary ſtill to examine the rigid virtues of the two ſexes which are connected with juſtice, and the bold and nervous qualities which are allied to courage.

But almoſt all the diſtinctions, which can be made on theſe ſubjects, proceed upon the ſame principles. Thus, for inſtance, in regard to equity, whence ariſe the

duties

duties of a ſevere and impartial juſtice; if there is one of the ſexes which almoſt always feels before it judges, and which is led by an imagination, that gives it averſions or likings for which it cannot account; whoſe caprices an uniform and inflexible rule would fatigue; and whoſe deciſions have at all times been more governed by particular ideas, than by general views: it muſt be owned, that ſuch a character agrees ill with that rigid equity which pays leſs regard to circumſtances than to facts, and to perſons than to things. Hence women rarely reſemble the law, which pronounces without love or hate. Their juſtice has always ſome head-mark, to diſtinguiſh thoſe whom it condemns

demns or abſolves. Conſult the annals of hiſtory, and you will find them generally bordering on exceſs of pity, or exceſs of vengeance. They want that cool deliberation which knows where to ſtop: to them moderation is torment.

A woman of ſome genius has ſaid †, that the French ſeem to have eſcaped from the hands of nature, ſince they have nothing in their compoſition but air and fire. She might have ſaid as much of her ſex; but ſhe, no doubt, was unwilling to betray her ſecret.

It might ſeem bold, to preſume to determine how far the two

† Madame de Graffini, *Lettres Peruviennes.*

ſexes

ſexes are by nature ſuſceptible of courage. But the word Courage is ſo vague, that to give it any determinate idea, we muſt diſtinguiſh that virtue into its different ſpecies.

The diſtinction of mental and animal courage, is well known: but theſe two kinds ſubdivide themſelves again. In the courage of mind, for example, we find a courage of principle, which defies opinion; a courage of will, which gives energy to the ſoul, and ſpurns conſtraint; a courage of conſtancy, which ſupports the idea of toil, and toil itſelf; a calm courage, which, in the moſt delicate circumſtances, views all things deliberately. In the animal courage,

rage, in like manner, we find a courage againſt pain, which knows how to ſuffer; a courage againſt danger, whether it conſiſts of that hardineſs which encounters, or that firmneſs which keeps its poſt; an habitual courage, which is always the ſame, and which diſcovers itſelf at all times, and upon all occaſions; and that enthuſiaſtic courage, which is a kind of fine fever of the ſoul, which rages and ceaſes by fits, and which meets with intrepidity at one time, what it would ſhrink from at another.

It would not be neceſſary to make a particular application of theſe details: the reader's own reflections will be ſufficient. We ought, however, to obſerve, that the courage

which the women poſſeſs in the higheſt degree, is that of ſupporting pain; which is no doubt owing to the variety of ills to which they are ſubjected by nature. But whatever it proceeds from, the fact is certain: they would ſooner ſuffer than diſpleaſe, and would a thouſand times rather endure pain than reproach.

We have likewiſe ſeen women demonſtrate an extraordinary courage in danger; but it is always owing to ſome ſtrong paſſion, or great idea, which rouſes their minds, and elevates them above themſelves. Then their inflamed imagination gives a new direction to the imagination of their ſex; and their ardent ſenſibility, tending

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ing to one object, attracts the little ſenſibilities of character, which are the ſources of fear and of weakneſs. Under ſuch agitations they poſſeſs a courage which nothing can withſtand, and which in effort exceeds even habitual valour; which, by reaſon of its experience, has leſs impetuoſity, as it borders leſs upon extravagance.

Theſe are ſome of the ſubjects which ſhould be diſcuſſed and compared, in ſettling the diſpute of the Equality, or Superiority of the Sexes. To treat the queſtion properly, it would be neceſſary to be at the ſame time a phyſician, an anatomiſt, and a philoſopher; to be equally rational and ſentimental; and, above all theſe ſingular attain-

ments, one muſt have the misfortune to be perfectly diſintereſted.

SECTION VI.

Of the Decline of ſerious Gallantry, and of the Progreſs of Society in FRANCE.

THE ſixteenth century, in which the diſpute of the ſuperiority of the ſexes was ſo much agitated, appears to have been the moſt brilliant era in the annals of women. After that period we find fewer champions, either literary or warlike, enliſted under their banners. The enthuſiaſm of ſerious gallantry was ſomewhat abated. The entire exſtinction of chivalry in Europe; the abolition of tournaments; the religious wars in Germany, and in France, which drew

the women of rank to court; and the manners which neceſſarily flow from idleneſs, from intrigue, and from beauty being regarded as an inſtrument of fortune — in ſhort the new taſte of ſociety which began univerſally to prevail, a taſte which poliſhed the manners in corrupting them, and which, by mingling the ſexes advantageouſly, taught them to ſeek one another more, but eſteem one another leſs; —all contributed to diminiſh a ſentiment, which, to gather ſtrength, ſtands in need of obſtacles, and of a certain ſtate of the ſoul in which it is honoured by its deſires, and reſpected even from its weakneſs.

The progreſs of this revolution, however, was for ſome time ſlow

in France. Under Francis I. who gave the ſignal of corruption, we find ſtill in the affairs of love a jealouſy, a revenge, a hate, and crimes which prove the manners.

Under Catherine of Medicis, love was a mixture of gallantry and fury. The Italian ardour mingled itſelf with the French voluptuouſneſs. All was intrigue. They talked of carnage in the rendezvous of beauty, and meditated in dancing the ruin of nations. In the meantime, the attention to policy and war, the factions, the parties, and a romantic ſomething which ſtill remained, gave an energy to the ſoul, which diſcovered itſelf even in the ſentiments which the women inſpired.

The

The reign of Henry IV. diſplayed a milder gallantry. That prince joined the courteous manners of a knight, to the weakneſſes of a great king. It was thought an honour to imitate him; and his courtiers, bold and brilliant, accuſtomed to glory and to conqueſt, carried into love a ſpecies of that noble courage which they had diſplayed in the combats of war. They were corrupted, but not debaſed.

Under Lewis XIII. genius, which began to unfold itſelf, mingled metaphyſics with gallantry. Every body knows the famous theſis which Cardinal Richlieu cauſed to be ſupported on love. That ludicrous injunction, which ſome may

ſuppoſe was given in jeſt, and intended as a burleſque on the miſapplication of learning and talents, was no more than a ſerious expreſſion of the manners of thoſe times in France. The religious conteſts had brought controverſy into faſhion. The infant taſte in letters made them take the ſcholaſtic forms for ſcience. A falſe wit ſprung from a deſire of being witty, and the inability to be ſo. The gallantry, which mingled itſelf with all things, and which diſturbed nothing, becauſe it was not deep — the gallantry, which was rather a twiſt of the fancy than a ſentiment of the heart, adopted the whole maſs of abſurdities, and formed a jargon equally myſtical, metaphyſical, and romantic. There

was

was nothing written or talked of, but diſſertations upon the delicacies and the ſacrifices of love.

Though we generally deſcant little upon what we feel much, yet theſe converſations and reaſonings diſcovered a turn of mind, which, in permitting gallantry, connected it with tenderneſs, and which always joined to the idea of woman the ideas of ſenſibility and reſpect.

The regency of Anne of Auſtria, and the war of the minority, formed a ſingular era. France was a ſcene of anarchy: but the taſte of the times mingled pleaſantry with battles, and ballads with factions. All things then were conducted by

by women. They had in that period all the reſtleſs agitation which is communicated by the ſpirit of party; a ſpirit which is leſs foreign to their character than is commonly ſuppoſed. Some produced the ſhock, others received it. Every one according to her intereſt and her views caballed, wrote, and conſpired. Their aſſemblies were at midnight. A woman in a bed, or on a ſopha, was the ſoul of the council. There ſhe determined to negociate, to fight, to embroil or accommodate matters with the court.

Love preſided at all their conſultations. They conſpired to ruin a lover in the affections of his miſtreſs, and a miſtreſs in the favour of her lover, with as much ſolemnity

nity as to lay waſte a city, or aſſaſſinate a prince; and not without reaſon: for a revolution in love almoſt always announced a revolution in politics.

Each woman had her department, and her dominion. Madame de Montbazon, fair and ſhewy, governed the duke of Beaufort; Madame de Longueville, the duke of Rochefoucault; Madame de Chatillon, Namours and Condé; Mademoiſelle de Chevreuſe, the Coadjutor; Mademoiſelle de Saujon, devout and tender, the duke of Orleans; and the ducheſs of Bouillon, her huſband.—In the meantime Madame de Chevreuſe, lively and warm, reſigned herſelf to her lovers from taſte, and to poli-

politics occaſionally; and the Princeſs Palatine, in turns the friend and the enemy of the great Condé, by means of her genius more than by her beauty, ſubjected all whom ſhe deſired to pleaſe, and whom ſhe had either a whim or an intereſt to perſuade. She poſſeſſed at once a paſſionate heart and a ſound head; and ſhe was no leſs romantic in love, than politic in the affairs of the ſtate.

Women often appeared publicly at the head of factions, in camps, and in councils of war. Then, to the ornaments of equipage and dreſs, they joined the enſigns of their party. At ſuch a ſight one muſt have ſuppoſed himſelf tranſported to the regions of ro-

romance, or carried back to the times of ancient chivalry. On the field, and in the fortreſs, inſtruments of muſic were mingled with inſtruments of war; curiaſſes with violins; lutes with ſpears; and the poliſhed features of beauty bloomed by the ſide of the war-worn ſoldier.

Devotion, among the women, blended itſelf with the ſpirit of faction, as the ſpirit of faction did with gallantry. They plotted one hour, and prayed the next. So many women of rank never became Carmelites, as at this time. It ſeemed as if the ſoul, rouſed by violent commotions, applied itſelf to all things with greater impetuoſity; and that imagination, inflamed.

flamed by ſo much exerciſe, ruſhed with equal rapidity to war, to love, to religion, and to rebellion.

The ſpirit of gallantry, during the regency, had nearly the ſame character, and the ſame ſymptoms, as under Louis XIII. except that the civil war, and that extravagance which great commotions give to the ſoul, warmed the little tincture of chivalry which ſtill remained in the cup of love.

Anne of Auſtria had brought to the court of France, a part of the manners of her country. It was a mixture of coquetry and pride, of ſenſibility and reſerve; that is to ſay, a remnant of the ancient and ſhining gallantry of the Moors,

Moors, joined to the pomp and the ſtatelineſs of the Caſtillians. Then dances, romances, plays, intrigues, all were Spaniſh. Diſguiſes and nocturnal ſcenes became the faſhion: but the French vivacity ſubſtituted the violin in place of the languiſhing guitar. That polite and loyal people, affected paſſions which they had not, and counted it an honour publicly to gibbet thoſe which they had. A ſacred homage to beauty, was numbered among the duties of of men. Every thing that related to women was viewed with an eye of importance: the moſt inconſiderable trifles had a value; and a preſent of a bracelet, or a complimentary card, made an event in life. They talked as ſeriouſly of an

affair of gallantry, as of the progreſs of a negociation, or the iſſue of a battle *.

It was this ſpirit which formed the character of the firſt romances

* The verſes of the duke of Rochefoucault to Madame de Longueville, are well known.

Pour mériter ſon cœur, pour plaire à ſes beaux yeux,
J'ai fait la guerre aux rois, je l'aurois faite aux dieux.

"To merit that heart, and to pleaſe thoſe bright eyes,
"I warr'd againſt kings, I'd make war 'gainſt the ſkies.

The duke de Bellegarde, who declared himſelf the ſublime lover of the queen, in taking leave of her majeſty to take upon him the command of an army, begged, as a particular favour, that ſhe would condeſcend to touch the hilt of his ſword;—and, during the civil war, M. de Chatillon, enamoured of Mademoiſelle de Guerchi, wore one of her garters tied round his arm in a battle.

of

of the age of Lewis XIV:—eternal romances, becauſe the writers ſuppoſed that all paſſion muſt be durable; ſerious, becauſe they conſidered love as an important concern in life; full of adventures, becauſe they imagined it muſt turn the brain; full of converſations, becauſe they made it a ſcience, which had its principles and forms; heroic, above all things, becauſe it muſt throw the greateſt men at the feet of the women, and becauſe they then believed that true paſſion is inſeparable from honour, and will elevate itſelf to its object, in place of ſeeking to debaſe it.

It was that ſpirit likewiſe which formed the French theatre; and

which made the great Corneille himſelf blend love with the intereſt of ſtates, with maſſacre, conſpiracy, and parricide.

It was the ſame general ſpirit perhaps, which, reigning during the infancy of Lewis XIV. obtained to that monarch among the women the character of being at once great and tender; by which, when young, and paſſionately in love, he would have placed one of his ſubjects upon the throne, and was afterwards able to conquer his weakneſs; by which he conceived a paſſion, not leſs warm, for Henrietta of England, yet curbed its violence; by which, always a king, though always a lover, he from his youth knew to preſerve dignity

nity in his pleaſures. But, though he covered ſenſuality with decency, the manners of the women, by a concurrence of circumſtances, muſt have been much altered under his reign.

Hitherto the vices of the court had not been thoſe of the nation. The different orders of the ſtate were more ſeparated. The nobility ſtill retained a remnant of that feudal grandeur, which had made them, at once, the formidable rivals of the prince, and the imperious tyrants of the people. The greater their power, the greater the diſtinction of ranks. Family pride kept even wealth at a diſtance. Vanity had not yet given the ſignal of union. The crown,

no longer jealous, removed its barriers; but the nobility multiplied theirs, to ſeparate themſelves more completely from thoſe who might have the inſolence to pretend to equality.

In thoſe times, licentiouſneſs and freedom of manners were almoſt always regarded as the privilege of rank. The vices of the great were even a part of the oppreſſion of the common people: we are ſeldom inclined to imitate thoſe whom we hate. The manners of the court therefore could only be communicated to the chief magiſtrates, and to the rich. But the magiſtrates were ſecure in their auſterity: living in the ſtudy, and in the exerciſe of juſtice,

juſtice, they aſtoniſhed the court, and diſdained its vices. With regard to the people of wealth, few were really wealthy; the ſhameful, or the recent acquiſition of certain fortunes, did not permit the familiarity of pride with thoſe who were; and luxury, which only can place the rich on a level with the great, was by no means general. The nobility had not yet need of trading with their names; and the traders had ſtill leſs thought of purchaſing titles.

As people of buſineſs and commerce were then much occupied in their reſpective employments, they had little time to loſe; and, conſequently, little knowledge of ſociety. The manners of all who

did not belong to the court were very unpoliſhed; and that ſpecies of ancient ruſticity was the greater bar to coalition, becauſe it was an object of ridicule among the courtiers. The contraſt of behaviour marked the limits of pride: the line was too ſtrongly drawn to be miſtaken; and neither party was willing to croſs it.

Between the capital and the provinces there were not fewer barriers than between the ranks in life. The inſecurity of travelling, the ſcarcity of great roads, of carriages; and, above all, the abſence of luxury and factitious wants; and, of courſe, the abſence in a great meaſure of that reſtleſs diſſipation which hurries the

the preſent inhabitants from place to place, and which makes them run in crowds to the capital in queſt of gold, of ſlavery, and of vice; by retaining every one under the roof of his fathers, contributed to preſerve the manners of the nation.

But, under Lewis XIV. all things changed. The people of the court, having only titles without power, and being reduced from a real to an imaginary grandeur, mingled more freely in general ſociety, and with the people of the city. The inequality of fortunes increaſed with the inequality of taxes. More value was ſet upon wealth. The great had more wants, the rich had more ſtate; the poor, cor-

rupted by their deſires, had leſs virtue: all ranks approximated.

The magnificence and luxury of the prince foſtered theſe ideas. His courtiers, involved in debt by their loyalty, and ruined by their pride, ſoon came to careſs thoſe whom they deſpiſed. To preſerve their titles, it was neceſſary to ſhare them with families of inferior condition. Gold, extorted from the poor, became the mediator between the rich and the great. The magiſtracy itſelf was metamorphoſed. All who reſorted to Verſailles partook of its manners. The difference of accent was loſt in the poliſh of ſociety. The ruſt of ancient manners diſappeared. All orders of men mingled.

The

The provinces were deſerted. The miſery of the country, the luxury of the city; the ambition, the amours, the reputation of the prince, and his conqueſts; the romantic feaſts of his court; the pleaſures even of the mind drew every body to the capital. They went there in crowds; quitted their prejudices, bluſhed for their manners, and at once poliſhed, enriched, and corrupted themſelves.

It is eaſy to ſee what influence all theſe changes, and this univerſal intercourſe muſt have had upon the women. Gallantry became the faſhion, and freedom of manners a grace. Every body imitated the court; and, from one end of the kingdom to the other, the vices circulated

circulated with the accompliſh-ments.

Another revolution accompa-nied that of the manners.

In a country where ſociety and letters begin to be cultivated, a taſte for literature muſt prevail among the women. But, as that taſte is ſlowly formed; becauſe the delicate feeling which diſcovers the natural and the graceful, and which enables us to paint them with truth, is acquired by habit; as we are apt to think that muſt be admired which has coſt us much trouble, and that it muſt be the more ſo the leſs it reſembles any other compoſition; as what is falſe often appears fine, becauſe it preſents

preſents a new colouring, and ſhades part of the object to make the reſt ſpring out; as, in ſhort, whatever is the prevailing humour is carried to extravagance, wit muſt at firſt be miſtaken for genius;—the women, who attempted to diſtinguiſh themſelves, invented expreſſions which were much admired, becauſe they were little underſtood. They made uſe of ſingular words, when they were at a loſs for ideas; and, to avoid being common, they became ridiculous.

Every thing contributed to this delirium:—the Italian and Spaniſh books, which were ſtill much in vogue; the romances of Mademoiſelle Scudery; the real admiration

tion of what they called the *précieuſes*; the converſations of the hôtel de Rambouillet; in ſhort, the ſociety and the impoſing name of Madame de Longueville; who, after being in the ſweep and at the head of factions, old, and without lovers, as without cabal, amuſed herſelf in writing metaphyſically upon love, and logically upon wit; and who taſteleſsly preferred Voiture to Corneille.

Moliere, by attacking with ridicule the learning of women, made not only its extravagancies, but the taſte itſelf, diſappear. Some women afterwards devoted themſelves to letters, and ſome cultivated the ſciences; but that ſpirit was by no means general.

In

In the moſt enlightened age, women were not permitted to be intelligent, without becoming the objects of deriſion. They were obliged to hide themſelves to improve their minds; and they bluſhed on the diſcovery of their knowledge, as much as, in ruder ages, they had bluſhed on the diſcovery of an intrigue.

As all good has its exceſs, and a proverb cannot need a reaſon; by aſſociating what is ridiculous with what is reſpectable, the learning of women, like every thing elſe, may be brought into contempt. To examine the queſtion however impartially, it appears, that in a country and in an age very remote from that primitive innocence which attaches

taches the heart to the pure pleaſures of retirement, and which makes us happy in the ignorance of every thing—but our duty; in an age when the general manners are corrupted by idleneſs; when all the vices mingle by diſſipation; and when the virtues cannot be replaced, or ſupplied, but by the help of reaſon, inſtead of deterring women from inſtructing themſelves, it muſt be neceſſary to encourage them. Not all the humour of Moliere had been able to raiſe a laugh againſt the lovely ſex, on account of their learning if he had not ſubſtituted folly for wiſdom. Socrates periſhed by ſuch a miſapplication of ridicule.

If Moliere, in place of ridiculing the abuſe of learning in women, had exhibited an example of its happy effects, oppoſed to thoughtleſs levity and giddy amuſement; if he had painted a woman, young and beautiful, whoſe mind was opened by a liberal education, and who retained all the graces of her ſex; who could think deeply, but who aſſumed nothing; who covered her knowledge with a gentle veil, and who had always a facility of temper, a preſence of mind, and an eaſe of manner, which made her moſt profound reaſonings appear to be the reſult of nature; who could eſtimate and feel the greateſt concerns, without being above the leaſt; who proſecuted her ſpeculations only to heighten

heighten the commerce of friendſhip, and render more exquiſite the intercourſe of affection; who, in ſtudying and knowing the heart of man, had learned to have more indulgence for his weakneſſes, and more reſpect for his virtues; who, in ſhort, ranked her duties above all things, but her mental accompliſhments next to her duties, and who only employed in ſtudy what may be called the *void* of life—the intervals of ſociety, and the receſs of domeſtic affairs, in bettering her heart by embelliſhing her underſtanding;—he would have done a real ſervice to women, to virtue, to his country, and to the world.

But though the women under Lewis XIV. were, in general, laughed

laughed out of their paſſion for letters, the politeneſs of the age introduced a ſpirit ſomewhat allied to it, and which was then much in faſhion, particularly at court. It may be called the *talent of ſociety:* an amiable kind of genius which delights in light graces, which is fonder of beauty than ſublimity, and which borrows few of its ornaments from ſcience, or does it in ſo eaſy a way that ignorance cannot be jealous, and knowledge dares not blame; which throws out agreeable trifles, and which ſometimes can bring itſelf to compoſe with elegance a few facetious or ſprightly verſes; which always charms in converſation, without ſeeming to aim at it; which pleaſes every body; which

humbles nobody; and, even when it ſhines moſt, which has a manner that pleads its excuſe, and makes us perceive that it is free from oſtentation or vanity. Such was the well-known genius of la Fayette, of Ninon, of la Suze; of la Sabliére and of Sevigné; of Thianges and of Monteſpan; of the dutcheſs of Bouillon, and of the fair Hortenſa Mancini her ſiſter; in ſhort, of Madame de Maintenon; who, when young, was the delight of Paris, and till ſhe inhabited a court, and was condemned to grandeur and to care *.

After

* Among thoſe celebrated women, we always diſtinguiſh Madame de la Fayette and Madame de Sevigné.

Madame de la Fayette, ſo well known by her ingenious romances, full of ſweet ſenſibility,

After all theſe accompliſhed women, commended with levity by the poets, or gravity by the ora-

bility, joined to a ſound underſtanding all the graces of wit and character. It was ſhe who firſt introduced into the romance ſentiment in place of adventure, and agreeable men inſtead of heroes. She performed in her walk what Racine did in his. In ſubſtituting intereſt for incident, and men for prodigies, ſhe proved, that we love better to be moved than aſtoniſhed.

Madame de Sevigné has formed, without deſign, of her letters written occaſionally, a moſt enchanting book. Full of imagination in her ſtile, ſhe has almoſt created a new language. She throws out every moment expreſſions, which the head could not ſuggeſt, and which a ſenſible heart can only feel.

N. B. Moſt of thoſe elegant women were celebrated by the poets of their age; but it is remarkable, that in all the verſes of Boileau there is not to be found the name of a ſingle woman of his time.

tors, there are ſtill two, who, though of a rank and order different, arrived neverthelefs at the higheſt celebrity. The one is the famous Mademoiſelle de Scudery, who lived to the age of eighty-five, ſixty years of which period ſhe ſpent in writing with elegance ſome pretty verſes, which are ſtill admired, and with an amazing facility voluminous romances, which are no more read. Theſe romances however were once able to turn heads; and the prejudice in favour of her manner was almoſt a match for the ſatires and taſte of Boileau. The other is the learned Mademoiſelle le Febvre, ſo well known under the name of Madam Dacier. Her merit, it is true, was not that of a woman,

but

but ſhe choſe a good time to aſſume the character of a man; and, though ſhe had not the manner of Ninon, ſhe did not want her admirers. The two languages natural to her, were thoſe of Terence and Homer; and madrigals were often ſent to her in Greek and Latin. The moſt learned men in Europe conſpired to found her praiſe.

I ſay nothing of the other women who wrote about the ſame time. The catalogue is every where to be found. Beſides, I ſpeak only here of the women whoſe genius had a character, and who can ſerve to illuſtrate the ideas or the manners of their age. This is a picture, not a hiſtory.

The reſult of the manners, and the general character of the wo-

men of that age was, a voluptuouſneſs united with decency; activity directed to intrigue; little learning; many accompliſhments; a refined politeneſs; a remnant of empire over men; a reſpect for all the religious ideas, which mingled themſelves with that coquetry of manners, and remorſe always by the ſide, or in the train of love.

During the regency, and under the reign of Lewis XV. the manners underwent another revolution. The latter years of Lewis XIV. had ſhed over the court, and part of the nation, an air of dejection and melancholy. At bottom the inclinations were the ſame; but they were more repreſſed. A new court and new ideas changed all

all things. A bolder ſenſuality became the faſhion. The deſires grew more confident and impetuous; and part of the veil which covered gallantry was torn away. Decency, which had hitherto been reſpected as a duty, was not even regarded as a pleaſure. Shame was mutually communicated—and mutually pardoned. Levity joined itſelf to exceſs; and a corruption was formed at the ſame time frivolous and deep, which laughed at every thing, that it might bluſh at nothing.

The ruin of families, and the ſhifting of fortunes, precipitated this change. Exceſſive miſery and exceſſive luxury were the conſequences;—and the influence of

theſe is known. A ſudden revolution rarely happens in the property of a people, without a quick alteration in manners.

For upwards of ſix centuries, gallantry had formed the character of the nation; but the ſpirit of chivalry always mingled itſelf with that ſentiment; which ſpirit, inſeparably connected with honour, gave to gallantry at leaſt the *reſemblance* of love, and to vice as much of virtue as its nature is ſuſceptible of. But when few traces of ancient honour remained, gallantry itſelf was loſt; it became a ſentiment which always ſuppoſed weakneſs, or endeavoured to produce it.

In

In the meantime, by that general ſympathy which attracted all ranks, the taſte for the ſociety of women increaſed, and the intercourſe of the ſexes became more frequent. Hope grew more ſanguine, as ſeduction grew more eaſy. The men every day aſſociated leſs with each other; the women, leſs timid, threw off that decent reſerve which is their honour. The two ſexes changed characters; the men ſet too high a value upon perſonal charms, the women on independence.

As the youths were more anxious to be men of the world than men of buſineſs, they entered ſooner into ſociety. Theſe young men, corrupted by the libertine part

part of the other ſex, joined the faults of their age to thoſe of their character. Having in general more deſires than ideas, an empty head and an unprincipled heart,—inconſtant through vanity, or multiplying their amours from idleneſs,—ſetting no value upon opinion, which for them indeed had no exiſtence,—they communicated to a great number of women their vices and irregularities.

The irkſomneſs of time, and the univerſal deſire to pleaſe, ſpread ſtill wider and wider the ſpirit of ſociety, till the nation arrived at its preſent ſtate of ſociability and general intercourſe; where manners and character are ſacrificed to elegance and politeneſs, while vir-

tue and ſentiment are exchanged for pleaſure and amuſement.

SECTION VII.

Of the Progreſs of Society in BRITAIN, *and of the Character, Manners, and Talents of the* BRITISH WOMEN.

WHAT poliſhed nations underſtand by ſociety, appears to have been little known in England, before the reign of Henry VIII. This backwardneſs may in ſome meaſure be aſcribed to our continual wars with France and with Scotland: by our quarrels with the one we were ſhut out from foreign intercourſe, and by our hoſtilities with both we were diverted from cultivating the arts of peace.

The ſpirit of chivalry, which produced ſuch amazing effects on the

the Continent, was more weakly felt here. Edward III. had indeed eſtabliſhed the order of the garter; but real wars allowed the knights little time for the mock encounter, or the generous viſions of romantic heroiſm; and love was ſtill a ſimple paſſion, which led the ſhorteſt way to its gratification, and generally in conformity with law and cuſtom. It partook little of imagination; and, conſequently, required few perfections in its object: it aſpired neither at angels nor goddeſſes.

The women, who ſtill retained all their native innocence and modeſty, were regarded only as wives and mothers. Where qualifications are not demanded they will never be found: the accompliſh-

compliſhments of the ſex entitled them to no other character; and it had perhaps been happy for both ſexes, if they could have remained in ſuch a ſtate of ſimplicity.

The Scots, by means of their alliance with France, which had ſubſiſted for ſeveral centuries, and that ſpirit of adventure which has at all times led them abroad in queſt of reputation, civil or military, may be ſuppoſed at this time to have been better acquainted with the elegancies of life than their wealthy and powerful neighbours:—and we actually find, in the court of James IV. a taſte in muſic, in letters, and in gallantry, to which the great monarch of the houſe of Tudor and his haughty barons were yet ſtrangers.

But

But the political ſtate of both kingdoms was an inſuperable bar to all liberal intercourſe. The barons, or chiefs, were hoſtile to the court, from which they had every thing to fear, and nothing to hope; they were dreaded by it in their turn; they looked from the walls of their caſtles with a jealous eye on each other; they never went abroad but attended by a numerous train of domeſtics; they viſited each other with the ſtate, and the diffidence of neighbouring princes; their marriages were contracted from family motives, and their courtſhips were conducted with the greateſt form, and the moſt diſtant reſpect. They took liberties indeed with the women of inferior condition, and they

they rioted in thoughtleſs jollity with their dependents: but the ideas of inferiority and dependence are incompatible with thoſe of ſociety and gallantry.

Henry VII. by curbing the hoſtile ſpirit of the barons, by abridging their power, by diminiſhing their retainers; by extending commerce; by encouraging agriculture; by ſecuring peace to his ſubjects, at home and abroad, prepared the way for learning, arts, and elegance But the taſte of the nation was not yet ripe for their reception; and the temper of his ſon, Henry VIII. was not highly favourable to ſuch a revolution. That prince, however, by his taſte for tournaments, foſtered the ſpirit of

of chivalry; and, by his paſſion for controverſy, he encouraged a ſpecies of learning, though not the moſt agreeable: by his magnificence and profuſion he drew the nobility to court; who, ſince deprived of their judicial authority, had leſs buſineſs to detain them in the country; and, by his interviews with the emperor and the French king, he rouſed their emulation of foreign elegance: they were ſmit with the love of letters and of gallantry. The earl of Surrey, in particular, celebrated his miſtreſs in his verſes, and defended her honour with his ſword, againſt all who dared with unhallowed lips profane her immaculate name.

The women in this reign likewiſe began to diſcover a taſte for literature and politeneſs. The counteſs of Richmond, mother to Henry VII. and who ſurvived him, had ſhewn the way. She tranſlated two pious treatiſes from the French; and was a great patroneſs of learning. Elizabeth Blount, miſtreſs to Henry VIII. was a woman of elegant accompliſhments; and his laſt queen, Catherine Parr, wrote with facility both in Latin and in Engliſh, and appears beſides to have been a woman of addreſs.

But the houſe of Sir Thomas More, whoſe eldeſt daughter, Mrs. Roper, has been already mentioned among the learned women of this

period, ſeems in a more particular manner to have been the habitation of the Muſes, and even of the Graces. He was poſſeſſed of all the learning of antiquity; he was pious even to weakneſs; for he appears to have given credit to the propheſies of the Maid of Kent: but neither his religion nor his learning ſoured his temper, or blunted his taſte for ſociety. His ideas of the female character would do honour to a gentleman of the preſent age. In an elegant Latin poem to a friend, on the choice of a wife, he ſpeaks to the following purpoſe. "May you "meet with a wife not ſtupidly ſi- "lent, nor always prattling non- "ſenſe; may ſhe be learned, if "poſſible, or at leaſt capable of

" being made ſo. A woman thus
" accompliſhed will be always
" drawing ſentiments and maxims
" out of the beſt authors. She will
" be herſelf, in all the changes of
" fortune; neither blown up with
" proſperity, nor broken in adver-
" ſity. You will find in her an
" even, chearful, good-humoured
" friend, and an agreeable compa-
" nion for life. She will infuſe
" knowledge into your children
" with their milk, and from their
" infancy train them up to wiſ-
" dom. Whatever company you
" are engaged in, you will long to
" be at home; and will retire with
" delight from the ſociety of men,
" into the boſom of a woman who
" is ſo dear, ſo knowing, and ſo
" amiable. If ſhe touches her

" lute, and more particularly if
" ſhe ſings to it any of her own
" compoſitions, it will ſoothe your
" ſolitude, and her voice will
" ſound ſweeter in your ear than
" the ſong of the nightingale.
" You will ſpend whole days and
" nights with pleaſure in her com-
" pany, and you will be always
" finding out new beauties in her
" mind. She will keep your ſoul
" in perpetual ſerenity; ſhe will
" reſtrain its mirth from being
" diſſolute, and prevent its me-
" lancholy from becoming pain-
" ful."--According to theſe ideas he educated his three daughters, whoſe virtues and talents appear to have merited all his care. They lived for ſome time in one houſe, with their father, their huſbands, and

their children, and formed a ſociety, all things conſidered, which has ſeldom, if ever, been equalled, in any age or country;—where morals were ſublimed by religion; where manners were poliſhed by a ſenſe of elegance, and ſoftened by a deſire to pleaſe; where friendſhip was warmed by love, and ſtrengthened by the ties of blood;—while converſation, animated by genius, enriched by learning, and moderated by reſpect, exulting in the dignity of its objects, ſeemed to approach to that fine tranſport, which immortal beings may be ſuppoſed to feel in pouring out their contemplations of the wiſdom and goodneſs of the Creator; and, when it condeſcended to treat of lighter ſubjects, wit had a ſpring,

humour a flow, and ſentiment a poignancy, which thoſe who are eternally diſcourſing of trifles, who hover continually on the ſurface of the earth, and rove like butterflies from ſenſe to ſenſe, both in their lives and converſations, can have no conception.

The religious conteſts, the reformations, and the perſecutions, which disfigured the latter part of the reign of Henry VIII. and which continued, with little intermiſſion, till the death of queen Mary, were a great bar to the progreſs of elegance and politeneſs in England: but it may be doubted how far they were hurtful to learning or to manners. Both parties, and both ſexes, were uncommonly zealous

to

to diſtinguiſh themſelves by virtues and by talents. Lady Jane Gray, and the three Seymours, who lived in this period, have already been mentioned among the ornaments of the ſixteenth century. Queen Mary herſelf was a writer of no mean rank; and Mary Roper, grand-daughter of Sir Thomas More, and one of the *gentlewomen*, as they were then called, of her majeſty's *privy-chamber*, is ſaid to have poſſeſſed all the learning and accompliſhments of her mother. She muſt have done honour to the court.

The reign of Elizabeth is juſtly conſidered as one of the moſt ſhining periods in Engliſh hiſtory; and for purity of manners, vigour

of mind, vigour of character, and perſonal addreſs, it is perhaps unequalled.

The magnificent entertainments which that illuſtrious princeſs ſo frequently gave her court, and at which ſhe generally appeared in perſon, with a moſt engaging familiarity, rubbed off the ancient reſerve of the nobility, and increaſed the taſte of ſociety, and even of gallantry: but the maſculine boldneſs of her character was unfavourable to female graces. The women of her court, like herſelf, were rather objects of reſpect than love. Their virtues were ſevere; their learning, their talents were often great: they had paſſions, but they knew to ſuppreſs them,

them, or to divert them into the channel of intereſt or ambition. They did not however want their admirers. Men were leſs delicate in thoſe days.

Spenſer, by writing his Fairy Queen, revived in Britain the ſpirit of chivalry, at a time when it began to expire on the continent; and Sir Philip Sidney, in his Arcadia, refined on that ſentiment. The Fairy Queen was intended as a compliment to Elizabeth; and the Arcadia was dedicated by Sir Philip to his ſiſter, the counteſs of Pembroke, the moſt amiable and accompliſhed woman of her time *.

But

* The following ingenious and well-known verſes were intended as part of her epitaph.

Under-

But the moſt remarkable women of this reign were the Lady Burleigh, the Lady Bacon, the Lady Ruſſel, and Mrs. Killigrew, all daughters of Sir Anthony Cooke, and all diſtinguiſhed for learning, genius, and virtue.

Elizabeth herſelf was a great and ſingular character. But ſhe had few qualities to recommend her as a woman, though paſſionately fond of perſonal admiration; nor were her talents as a writer either ſtriking or elegant, though ſhe appears

Underneath this ſable herſe
Lies the ſubject of all verſe;
Sidney's ſiſter, Pembroke's mother—
Death! ere thou haſt kill'd another,
Fair, and learn'd, and good as ſhe,
Time ſhall throw a dart at thee.

to

to have been ambitious of literary fame. Her ability as a ſovereign has been already conſidered, in treating of the talent of women for government. Her virtues were thoſe of her rank, and of her age; and her weakneſſes, thoſe of her ſex: yet they failed to render her amiable.

Mary queen of Scotland, (whoſe learning and accompliſhments have been already mentioned) the cotemporary of Elizabeth, and her rival in beauty, in letters, and in ſway, though a leſs perfect, is a more attractive character. While we blame her conduct, ſhe conciliates our affection. Even thoſe who accuſe her of guilt, muſt weep for her misfortunes; and will

will feel their boſoms ſwell with indignation againſt her inhuman ſubjects, and her perfidious protectreſs, while they read her unhappy ſtory, as told by her enemies.

The return of Mary to her native kingdom, after the death of her huſband Francis II. with all the elegancies of France ſuperadded to the fineſt natural endowments, made the Scots hope, and not without reaſon, that literature, arts, and politeneſs, would arrive at perfection among them, as ſoon as in any northern nation. But the ſpirit of fanaticiſm, which awaked in Scotland about this time, which was attended with ſuch amazing effects, and which ſpread itſelf

itſelf over the whole iſland; which produced the death of the lovely Mary, of the pious Charles, and which terminated in the expulſion of the royal houſe, threw a cloud over the manners and the ſtudies of that country, which two centuries have ſcarcely been able to diſpel †.

The acceſſion of James VI to the throne of England, contributed ſtill farther to obſtruct the progreſs of civilization in Scotland, and to the decline of the arts in that

† A bold ſpirit of liberty and independence however, which has been productive of many great and beneficial conſequences, mingled itſelf with that fanatical ſpirit, and ought for ever to free the Scots from the imputation of ſervility.

country.

country. The removal of the court, drew the nobility to London, to ſpend their fortunes, or obtain preferment; and men of genius and learning likewiſe looked this way.

That event, however, muſt have contributed to the advancement of ſociety in England. Yet not ſo much as might be expected. The ſcantineſs of James's revenue, together with his want of oeconomy, rendered him unable to ſupport the ſplendor of a court. It was beſides inconſiſtent with his maxims of policy, and with his temper. He loved to be ſocial with his friends, but hated a crowd; and had rather an averſion to the company of woman. A mean jealouſy, which

which took place of a generous emulation, between the Scots and Engliſh courtiers, prevented ſtill farther the refinement of manners; which can only be effected by a liberal intercourſe.

The nobility and gentry of England are ſtill fonder of a country life than thoſe of any poliſhed nation in Europe: it prevailed much more then, and was highly encouraged by James. He even iſſued proclamations, containing ſevere threatenings, againſt the gentry who lived in town. By theſe means the ancient pride of family was preſerved. Men of birth were diſtinguiſhed by a ſtatelineſs of carriage: much ceremony took place in the ordinary commerce of life;

and,

and, as riches acquired by trade were ſtill rare, little familiarity was indulged by the great.

The king's pacific, or rather puſilanimous diſpoſition, though it ſunk the national character, was favourable to commerce, and not altogether unfriendly to letters. James himſelf was a ſcholar; but he was unhappy in a bad taſte, which infected his whole court, and indeed the whole nation. He was fond of metaphyſical quibbles, the jingle of words, and every ſpecies of falſe wit. Such a taſte is in ſome meaſure inſeparable from the revival of letters: we admire what is glaring, before we can diſcern what is beautiful; but the ſanction, and even the example of

the

the monarch, only could have carried it to ſuch a height at this time in England. What induces one particularly to this opinion is, the comparative purity of the writers of the former reign. The contraſt between the compoſition of Spenſer and Drayton, is as great as between the character of Elizabeth and James.

The theatre, that great former of manners, and which is formed by them, had been founded by Shakeſpeare underthe reign of Elizabeth: he was ſucceeded by Jonſon and Fletcher. Theſe writers have ſeldom painted the manners of their own country, and ſeldomer thoſe of their own age; but, as they muſt have endeavoured to pleaſe the

people for whom they wrote, and as they no doubt knew the taſte of the public, we may diſcern that taſte more perfectly in their compoſitions than in the barren records of the times.

In the writings of Shakeſpeare we find all the noble ſpirit of the virgin-reign. Love has its native importance; and little more: it is productive of the greateſt events, when connected with circumſtances; but, when a ſimple paſſion, its effects are feeble and tranſient. He ſeldom attempts to be wanton; but when his ſubject makes it neceſſary to reveal the ſecrets of Venus, he does it with as much freedom as if ſhe were a common proſtitute: he expreſſes his meaning

in the plaineſt, and often in the broadeſt words.

But in the writings of Fletcher, —for I ſhall omit Jonſon, as being a cotemporary of Shakeſpeare, and therefore leſs proper to mark the gradation of taſte,—love has acquired an imaginary power: it is equal to every thing in itſelf; and ſeems to diſregard thoſe circumſtances which alone can give it conſequence; without which it is a boyiſh paſſion, that excites our contempt; but, connected with which, it is the ſtrongeſt ſentiment of our nature, and awakens moſt deeply the feelings of the human breaſt. He is frequently wanton, with a grace peculiar to himſelf;—for a genteel education and

a good natural taſte conſpired to render him the moſt elegant writer of his age;—he veils his idea beneath the delicacy of his language, or toys with it ſo prettily, that we often fall in love with a thought, which, rudely diſcloſed, could not fail to diſguſt.

We may therefore conclude, that the paſſion, or rather the commerce, between the ſexes was increaſed; that it was ambitious of being thought more important than it really was; that it had purpoſes to carry which made ſuch exaggeration neceſſary; that it had wiſhes to reveal which it durſt not avow; and which, conſequently, ſuggeſted the diſguiſe of delicate expreſſion. The duel, we know, had taken

taken place of the tournament; and the intrigue, we may be certain, would not be long behind.

Under Charles I. a good taſte in letters, in arts, and in ſociety, began to prevail. The king himſelf was both a judge and an example of fine writing; and he was a lover of painting, muſic, and architecture; all which he liberally encouraged. But the religious and political diſputes, which early in this reign divided the nation, and which brought about the death of the king, and the ſubverſion of the monarchy, diverted the thoughts of men from every elegant purſuit. The dread of popery and arbitrary power, of ſlavery and eternal damnation, and the hope of

heaven, and of liberty, threw the whole iſland into the moſt violent convulſions, and gave birth to ſome of the greateſt geniuſes, and called forth ſome of the greateſt characters, in the hiſtory of mankind.

The cavaliers, or royal party, however, notwithſtanding the horrors of civil war, maintained a gaiety of temper which was altogether aſtoniſhing, and a freedom of manners which too often bordered on licentiouſneſs. But the republicans, though perhaps not infected with fewer vices, and thoſe of a leſs amiable caſt, diſcover ſo much vigour of mind, ſuch a reſolute ſpirit of action, a love of freedom, and a contempt of death,

that

that we almoſt deſpiſe the poliſh of ſociety,—even while we deteſt the cant of hypocriſy.

The moſt diſtinguiſhed women of this period, in Britain, were the Ducheſs of Newcaſtle, Lady Pakington, and Lady Halket *.

Under

* The Ducheſs of Newcaſtle has left us a variety of compoſitions both in proſe and verſe, (tragedies, comedies, eſſays, hiſtories, orations, letters,) of no mean character. She appears to be the firſt Engliſh lady who attempted what is now called *polite literature*; which ought to be ſome apology for her want of correctneſs.

Lady Pakington has long been the *reputed*; and, from the proofs produced by Mr. Ballard, it appears the *real* author of *The Whole Duty of Man*, and ſeveral other moral and divine treatiſes; which are written with ſo much temper, purity, piety, philoſophy, and

Under the commonwealth the face of the nation was entirely changed; it experienced a revolution, as complete in manners as in policy. One would have imagined himſelf in a different world. The theatres were ſhut; games, ſports, ſhews, and amuſements of every kind were prohibited. Inſtead of the voice of mirth and joy, nothing was to be heard but groans,

good ſenſe, that ſhe may be juſtly reckoned the glory of her ſex, and an honour to human nature. What greatneſs of mind and goodneſs of heart muſt the perſon be poſſeſſed of, who could deny herſelf the honour of ſuch works, leſt the name of a woman ſhould render them of leſs ſervice to mankind!

Lady Halket was remarkable for her learning, and for her ſkill both in phyſic and divinity. Her writings are all of the religious kind, and are voluminous beyond all credibility.

ſighs,

ſighs, prayers, and ſpiritual ſongs. All liberal knowledge, ornamental learning, gentility of manner, elegance of dreſs, and all ſuperfluity in eating and drinking were proſcribed, as carnal vanities, and as the accomplices of ſin and Satan. All ranks, ages, and ſexes were confounded. The illuminations of the ſpirit placed all on a level. The leaders of the republic prayed, or exhorted one while, and liſtened the next to the meaneſt of the people. Women taught the brethren.

Thoſe fair divines, by reaſon of their finer feelings and more vivid imaginations, were often carried into the moſt extraordinary ſeverities, and the wildeſt enthuſiaſm. They were not contented with laying aſide the allurements of their ſex, with

with making a covenant with their eyes that they ſhould not rove, and with crucifying their thoughts; they condemned themſelves to humiliation and faſting, for the wandering of their hearts. Many of them conſidered cloaths of any kind to be improper. Whether this opinion proceeded from their looking upon dreſs as a luxury, or as unneceſſary to the truely regenerate, does not diſtinctly appear; but one of them, animated by that perſuaſion, came into the church where the Protector ſat, in the condition of our original mother before ſhe pluckt the fig-leaf, " to " be," as ſhe ſaid, " a *ſign* to the " people."

The men in general held in contempt all books but the Bible; and

and ſome of them were even above uſing that: they believed themſelves illuminated by the ſame ſpirit which inſpired the ſacred writings. One man, from the ſuper-abundance of this inward light, and a certain reſemblance between his countenance and the common pictures of Chriſt, conceived himſelf to be the ſaviour,—no doubt ſent to earth a ſecond time, to collect the faithful, and begin his millennial reign †. He pretended to work miracles: to cure the ſick, to raiſe the dead; and entered Briſtol mounted on a *horſe*—perhaps he thought an *aſs* too mean an animal, and that he had now a right to aſſume more dignity—

† Some have believed the millenium to be before, others after the reſurrection.

while

while his diſciples ſpread their garments before him, crying, " Ho-
" ſanna! to the Higheſt."

Love, under the commonwealth, was a mixture of cant and hypocriſy. Never was beauty ſo much in diſgrace. It was not only denied all adventitious ornaments and excellencies, but even the advantages of nature were ſubject of reproach:—it was forbid to pleaſe; and it was criminal to conſider it as an object of deſire.

" Man," ſaid the godly,—for ſo they called themſelves,—" is
" conceived in ſin, and brought
" forth in iniquity; he is a ſlave
" to the fleſh, till regenerated by
" the ſpirit; it was his compla-
" cency

" cency in woman that firſt wrought
" his debaſement: let him not
" therefore glory in his ſhame,
" let him not worſhip the foun-
" tain of his corruption!"

The emotions of nature were conſidered as the ſtruggles of original guilt; and beauty was viewed as a ſpell in the hands of Satan, to ſeduce the hearts of the faithful. The pleaſures of the marriage-bed were only indulged as the means of preventing a greater evil, and of increaſing the number of the ſaints; nor even then without fear and trembling, humiliation, and prayer, " that they might be " ſeparated from the *curſe!*"

But the reſtoration of monarchy made ample amends to beauty

beauty for the indignities of the commonwealth. The reign of Charles II. may be conſidered in one light, as the moſt glorious æra to women in the hiſtory of Britain, and as the moſt debaſing in another. They were never ſo much careſſed; never ſo little reſpected.

Charles himſelf had a ſuſceptible, but changeable heart; a ſocial temper; a genteel manner; a lively wit:—and his courtiers partook much of the character of their maſter. They had all ſuffered the preſſure of adverſity, the neglect of poverty, or felt the inſolence of pious tyranny. They began to think that Chriſtianity was a fable; that virtue was a cheat; that friendſhip

friendſhip and generoſity were but words of courſe; and, in greedily enjoying their change of fortune, they ſunk themſelves beneath the dignity of men. In avoiding ſpiritual pride, and in retaliating ſelfiſhneſs, they departed from the eſſential principles of religion and morals; and, by contraſting the language and the manners of hypocriſy, they ſhameleſsly violated the laws of decency and decorum.

Overjoyed at the return of their ſovereign, the whole royal party diſſolved in thoughtleſs jollity; and even many of the republicans, particularly the younger claſs, and the women, were glad to be releaſed from the gloomy auſterity of the commonwealth. A general relaxation

relaxation of manners took place. Pleaſure became the univerſal object, and love the prevailing taſte: but that love was rather an appetite than a paſſion. Beauty, unconnected with virtue, was its object: it was therefore void of honour and attachment. In conſequence of ſuch manners, female virtue, robbed of its reward, became rather a mode of behaviour, to inflame deſire, or procure elevation, than a ſentiment or principle; and, of courſe, ſooner or later, was either ſacrificed to inclination or to caprice.

But theſe obſervations, in their full extent, muſt only be underſtood of the court. The greater part of the gentry ſtill reſided on their

their eſtates in the country, equally ſtrangers to the pleaſures of the court and town; and one half of the iſland was filled with indignation at the vices of Whitehall. Nor without reaſon; for it was little better than one great brothel:—and the ſtage, which generally takes it complexion from the court, was a continued ſcene of ſenſuality, blaſphemy, and abſurdity.

The free intercourſe, however, of all ranks of men, from the king to the commoner, improved the talent of ſociety, and poliſhed the language of converſation; gallantry, licentious as it was, produced a habit of politeneſs; and from the irregular, and even impious freedom of writing and thinking,

ſprung many ſtrokes of real genius, and a liberal ſpirit of inquiry, whoſe reſearches and experiments have benefited mankind, and carried philoſophy and the ſciences to a height that does honour to modern times §.

The women of this reign, as may be expected from the taſte of the men, were more ſolicitous about adorning their perſons, than informing their minds. But the frequent intercourſe between the ſexes in ſome meaſure compenſated that neglect. By ſuch a commerce they became more eaſy, more free, more lively, and more capable of converſation, than the women of any preceding age. They had leſs learning, but more accompliſh-

§ The Royal Society was founded under Charles II.

ments;

ments; and, perhaps, more genius. They wanted nothing but virtue to have made their memories immortal: and, notwithſtanding the general depravity, there were ſome who trod the narrow path; whoſe taſte and ſentiments were uncorrupted, and whoſe names ſtill live in their writings, and in the verſes of their cotemporaries. Katherine Philips, (celebrated under the name of Orinda) Anne Killegrew, and Anne Wharton, employed their elegant talents in a manner ſuitable to their ſex. The female wantons of moſt genius were Behn and Centlivre, whoſe writings are both their honour and their diſgrace*.—Among

* From this cenſure however, may be excepted the Hiſtory of Oroonoko, and the Comedy of the Buſy Body.

the women of elegant, or ſpirited converſation, we ſhould perhaps diſtinguiſh the Dutcheſs of York, the Dutcheſs of Cleveland, Lady Cheſterfield, and the fair Hamilton.

The reign of James II. was too ſhort to have any diſtinct character. It is only ſingular for the blind bigotry, and blinder diſpoſition of the prince; which rouſed the minds of men from the delirium of pleaſure, in which they had been loſt, and brought about the Revolution.

Under William III. the effects of that change were viſible on the manners. The nation returned to what may be called its natural ſtate. An attention to juſt politics,

tics, to found philoſophy, and true religion, characterize the era of Britiſh liberty.

William himſelf was of a gloomy temper, and had a diſlike to the company of women. The intercourſe of the ſexes, and thoſe amuſements which are its conſequence, were therefore little countenanced during his reign. By theſe means the ladies had more time for the purſuits of learning and knowledge; and they made uſe of it accordingly. Many of them became adepts in the ſciences. Lady Maſham, and Mary Aſtell, in particular, diſcuſſed with judgement and ability the moſt abſtract points in metaphyſics and divi-

nity †; and Lady Grace Gethin, at the age of twenty, treated of life and morals with the diſcernment of Socrates, and the elegance of Xenophon. She is celebrated by Mr. Congreve.

The reign of queen Anne may be ſaid to have been the ſummer,

† Theſe two ladies differed on a very delicate point. Mary affirmed, that we ought to love with *deſire* God only, every other love being *ſinful*. Lady Maſham oppoſed that doctrine, as a dangerous refinement. Each had her abettors. Miſs Aſtell was ſupported by Mr. Norris, and Lady Maſham by Mr. Locke. — They were both great advocates for the learning of women; and their arguments and example appear to have rouſed many of the ſex to a more ſerious attention to religion and morality.

of

of which William's was only the ſpring. Every thing was ripened; nothing was corrupted. It was a ſhort, but glorious period, of heroiſm and national capacity; of taſte and ſcience, learning and genius; of gallantry without licentiouſneſs, and politeneſs without effeminacy.

We are in doubt which moſt to admire in the women of this reign, the manners, the talents, or the accompliſhments. They were religious without ſeverity, and without enthuſiaſm; they were learned without pedantry; they were intelligent and attractive, without neglecting the duties of their ſex; they were elegant and entertaining, without levity; in a word,

they joined the graces of ſociety to the knowledge of letters and the virtues of domeſtic life—they were friends and companions, without ceaſing to be wives and mothers.

In ſupport of the foregoing character of the Britiſh ladies under the reign of queen Anne, we need only add the names of Lady Chudleigh, Lady Winchelſea, the honourable Mrs. Monk, Mrs. Bovey, and Stella ‡.

Under

‡ Of theſe ladies, Mrs. Bovey is perhaps the leaſt known, as ſhe has left no writings, and had no poetical lover to ſpread her name. She is, however, very handſomely complimented by Sir Richard Steele, in the dedication of the ſecond volume of *The Ladies Library*; and Mrs. Manley, who wanted only virtue

Under George I. the manners of the nation were ſenſibly changed; but not ſo much as the national ſpirit. The South Sea ſcheme, and other mercenary projects, produced a paſſion of avarice, and a taſte of luxury, which prepared the way for all the corruptions of the following reign.

virtue to have been an ornament to her age, and to her ſex, gives the following elegant character of her in *The New Atalantis*. "Her "perſon has as many charms as can be de- "ſired; her air, her manner, her judgement, "her wit, her converſation, are admirable; "her ſenſe is ſolid and perſpicuous; and ſhe "is ſo perfect an oeconomiſt, that, in taking "in all the greater duties of life, ſhe does "not diſdain to ſtoop to the moſt inferior; "in ſhort, ſhe knows all that a man can "know, without deſpiſing what, as a wo- "man, ſhe ought not to be ignorant of."

The

The delirium of riches was beyond what the moſt extravagant imagination can conceive. Any ſcheme, however abſurd, met with encouragement, if it only propoſed ſufficient advantages. All ranks and conditions, and even women, reſorted to 'Change Alley, with the looks of harpies ready to ſeize upon their prey; but, in reality, the victims of their own credulity and ſordid paſſions. The peers of the realm became ſtock-jobbers, and its miniſters brokers; public virtue was loſt in the viſions of private benefit; letters fell into contempt, though ſupported by the greateſt examples of ſucceſsful genius; love grew covetous, and beauty venal.

There were however, in this reign, many women of liberal and elegant talents; among the firſt of whom may be ranked Lady Mary W. Montague, ſo well known for her ſpirited poems, and ingenious letters.

Under George II. and George III. the debaſement of mind diſcovered itſelf more fully in the manners. Corruption became general.

The Revolution had reſtrained the powers of the prince within ſuch narrow limits, that a coalition of parties, or the abſolute ſuperiority of one, was eſſential to carry the meaſures of government; and, as the oppoſition, or country party,

party, began to gather ſtrength, the political machine was in danger of ſtanding ſtill by counteracting forces. It was therefore neceſſary that there ſhould be an aſcendency; it was likewiſe perhaps neceſſary that it ſhould be on the ſide of the court.

At this criſis Robert Walpole, an artful and able miniſter, a lover of peace and an encourager of commerce, found means to increaſe the influence of the crown without enlarging the prerogative. But he did it at the expence of the virtues of the people:—and his example has been followed by all ſucceeding miniſters. He took advantage of that ſpirit of avarice and luxury which he had foſtered;

the

the treaſury was let looſe at elections. A majority was obtained of the refuſe of both parties; of men determined to ſupport the meaſures of the court in defiance of conſcience, honour, and honeſty—and who were only formidable by the number of their voices. Places and penſions were multiplied to reward the mercenary tribe; and men of ability and integrity were deprived of their employments, to make way for thoſe who were deſtitute of both. When virtue and talents are no longer the means of honour and preferment, they naturally diſappear in the public walks of life; they are only to be found in the ſolitary ſhade. Character ceaſed to create diſtinction. The effect of

ſuch

ſuch a want of ſentiment may eaſily be conceived. Patriotiſm became the common object of ridicule; and virtue and genius were made the butt of ignorance, dulneſs, and profligacy. But people muſt always have ſomething to be the foundation of ſelf-applauſe. Inſtead of the eſſential qualities of men and of citizens, they valued themſelves on a ſmooth addreſs, and an abſurd mixture of French levity and Engliſh gravity; on the ſplendor of their equipages; on the magnificence of their houſes; on the richneſs of their furniture; and on the elegance and ſumptuouſneſs of their tables.

The ruin of many ancient families by the late viſionary projects, and

and the exceſſive fortunes acquired by trade, contributed ſtill farther to increaſe the general maſs of manners. The pride of birth, the laſt barrier of corruption, was broken down. While people value themſelves upon their anceſtors, it is to be preſumed, that their actions will not be altogether unworthy of them. The nobility courted the alliance of the wealthy, to enable them to ſupport their ſtate: they intermarried with the ſons and daughters of commerce, without regard to character or accompliſhments. Riches became the only idol of worſhip, and poverty the only object of contempt.

Theſe however were not the only evils reſulting from ſuch a coalition.

tion. That reſpect to the higher orders of men, which is ſo neceſſary to preſerve due ſubordination in a ſtate, and that frugality and induſtry, which are ſo eſſential to the proſperity of traders, were at once deſtroyed by the union of the people of rank and commerce. The merchants ſoon vied with the peers of the realm, and the princes of the blood, in all the luxuries of life; and, by degrees, people of all conditions came to think themſelves entitled to the ſame indulgence; till, at length, the nation arrived at its preſent ſtate of ſociability, luxury, and vicious refinement; in which all ranks, ages, and ſexes mingle, and all aſpire at the ſame pleaſures and the ſame amuſements; in which taſte is a title to

enjoy-

enjoyment, and money an admittance to every polite circle, and to every auguſt aſſembly; to the ruin of manners, induſtry, public credit, and private faith; and to the increaſe of ſenſuality, idleneſs, fraud, villainy, violence, and all the licentious diſorders of a corrupted populace *.

The manners of the two ſexes, as has been already obſerved, generally keep pace with each other.

* Some of the foregoing obſervations may perhaps be thought foreign to the ſubject of this Eſſay; but the manners of women are ſo intimately connected with the manners of men, and thoſe of men with the ſtate, in this country, that it is impoſſible to ſeparate them entirely, without omitting many particulars neceſſary to be known for the perfect underſtanding of each.

In proportion as the men grew regardleſs of character, the women neglected the duties of their ſex. Though little inclined to hoarding, they are not perhaps leſs diſpoſed to avarice than men: gold to them is deſirable, as the miniſter of vanity, voluptuouſneſs, and ſhew. It became their ſupreme object, and the only ſource of the matrimonial union, to the excluſion of that tender ſentiment which alone can give ſtrength to the ſacred tie, or pleaſure to the nuptial ſtate. The young, the beautiful, the healthful, were wedded—though not always with their own conſent—to age, deformity, and diſeaſe; virtue was joined to profligacy, and wantonneſs to ſeverity.

Such

Such marriages were neceſſarily deſtructive of domeſtic felicity. The want of cordiality at home naturally leads us abroad, as the want of happineſs in ourſelves leads us to ſeek it in externals, and to torture imagination for the gratification of appetites, which, undepraved, are ſimple and uniform. New amuſements, and ſocieties of pleaſure, were every day formed; new modes of diſſipation were invented; the order of nature was changed; night and day were inverted; and fancy and language were exhauſted for names to the aſſemblies of politeneſs and gallantry. Nothing is ſo oppreſſive as time to the unhappy, or thought to the vacant mind: theſe were not all enough. They ſeemed a-

fraid of themſelves, and of each other. The huſband had one ſet of viſitors, the wife another; he proſecuted his pleaſures abroad, ſhe entertained her friends at home; or reſorted to ſome place of public amuſement, or private pleaſure. In a free country, it is unpardonable in a man to accuſe his wife without evidence, or to pretend to abridge her liberty;—and the guilty are ſilent for their own ſakes. It was often morning before they met at their joyleſs home.

A ſpirit of gaming, which mingled itſelf with diſſipation and pleaſure, afforded a new pretence for nocturnal meetings. Money loſt at play muſt be paid ſome-how; it is a debt of honour: and, to preſerve

preſerve family-peace, it is to be feared that women of virtuous principles have often ſacrificed ſomething more precious than their jewels. At any rate gaming diſcovers the temper, ruffles the paſſions, corrupts the heart, and breaks down the ſtrongeſt barrier of virtue,—a decent reſerve between the ſexes.

Love grew confident, as beauty became more acceſſible; and the freedom of manners permitted the warmeſt declaration without offence. The opportunities of gratification were infinite; the motives of reſtraint were few; and the temptations were many and great. A general ſenſuality

was the conſequence. Conjugal infidelity became common.

Men of ſpirit obtained divorces. But theſe, inſtead of enforcing the obligation of the marriage-vow, by the fear of public ſhame, appeared to have a quite contrary effect; they only propagated weakneſs: the ſeducing example of human frailty remained, the odium was forgot; while the equity of the ſentence was diſputed, or its ſeverity blamed. Huſbands were loudly accuſed of libertiniſm, and juſtly of neglect. The women continued to make repriſals, or make up their wants; the practice triumphed. Prudent men overlooked ſuch liberties, when conducted with decency, which it muſt

muſt be owned was ſeldom violated; and good-natured huſbands in general begin to adopt a polite opinion, which will at leaſt be conducive to private peace; viz. That a man is not more diſhonoured by the *amours* of his wife than by any other *deviation* of taſte, or than ſhe is by thoſe of her huſband.

In ſhort, unleſs manners take a turn, there is reaſon to believe that our Britiſh ladies, once ſo remarkable for modeſty, chaſtity, and conjugal fidelity, will ſoon equal their ſiſters of France in impudence, levity, and incontinence; as we already rival our continental brethren in foppery, falſhood, inconſtancy, vanity, — and in all their unmanly pleaſures, capri-

ous appetites, and emaſculating luxuries †.

But the fears of virtue are often groundleſs: fancy magnifies future evil, and overlooks preſent good: we have dwelt long enough—ſome may perhaps think too long—on the dark ſide of the picture. Our fair country-women ſtill poſſeſs many virtues, and more accompliſhments. Their gallantries are

† This character, in its full extent, muſt only be applied to the court and the capital. The women of the diſtant counties ſtill poſſeſs the domeſtic virtues in a conſiderable degree of perfection; the men are comparatively ſober and faithful; and the manners of the whole northern part of the iſland, are only arriving at that degree of refinement which is favourable to induſtry, to virtue, and to letters.

at

at leaſt regulated by a ſenſe of decency: voluptuouſneſs wears its lovelieſt form; delicacy is the handmaid of pleaſure: infidelity is oftener yet the effect of paſſion than of appetite; and elopements are ſtronger proofs of ſenſibility than the want of ſhame.

Notwithſtanding the general relaxation of manners, the averſion to whatever is ſerious, the thirſt of admiration, and the neglect of eſteem, or at leaſt of thoſe qualities which produce it, there are in this age, in this iſland, and even in this city, women who would have done honour to any age or country; who join a refined taſte and a cultivated underſtanding to a feeling heart, and who adorn their

their talents and their ſenſibility with ſentiments of virtue, honour, and humanity. We have women who could have reaſoned with Locke, who might have diſputed the laurel with Pope, and to whom Addiſon would have liſtened with pleaſure.

Even in the middle of opulence, and of that luxury which too often mingles avarice with ſtate, which narrows the heart, and makes it at the ſame time vain and cruel, we ſee women who yearly ſet apart a portion of their ſubſtance for the poor; who make it their buſineſs to find out the abodes of miſery, and who number among their pleaſures the relief of

the orphan, and the tears ſhed in the conſolation of the widow.

We have ſtill wives, young, beautiful, and affectionate, who honour their vows, and in the moſt delightful of human connections offer the moſt enchanting ſpectacle of innocence and love; who are not aſhamed to be mothers; who devote their happy hours to the tendereſt cares of nature; who watch with anxiety, who preſs with tranſport, by turns, in their lovely arms, to their lips, and to their breaſt, the infant whom they nouriſh with their milk, while the huſband, in ſilent joy, divides his fond regards between the mother and the child.

O that

O that theſe ſweet examples could revive among us nature and manners! — that we could learn how much the virtues, even for our happineſs, are ſuperior to the pleaſures! — how much a ſimple, cordial life, where nothing is affected, where we live in ourſelves, and in the objects of our ſenſibility,—where we enjoy by turns the delights of friendſhip, affection, and ſelf-approbation, is preferable to that giddy and diſſipated life, where we court continually a phantom which eludes our purſuit, or vaniſhes in our embrace!—Then the women would recover their empire; then beauty, adorned with virtue, would lead captive the hearts of men, — would reſtrain them from wandering, and teach them

them to be faithful,—happy in their ſervitude, and proud of their weakneſs; then a fine and blameleſs ſenſuality would ſeaſon every moment of exiſtence, and make life a delicious dream; then the pains of child-birth, unimpoiſoned by remorſe, a mother's pains, ſweetened by love and participated by friendſhip, would be rather a conflict of tenderneſs than a torment.

Society, in ſuch a world, would indeed be leſs buſy; but there would be more domeſtic peace. There would be leſs oſtentation, and more pleaſure; leſs diſſipation, and more happineſs. We would talk leſs of pleaſing, and we would pleaſe more. Our days would flow, like

like a pure and quiet ſtream;—and if, in the evening of life, we had not the ſorrowful ſatisfaction of having reciprocated the ſoft-eſt feelings with a hundred perſons—of whom we were unworthy, who were unworthy of us, or who had no ſhare in our hearts—we would at leaſt have the comfort to have lived with thoſe we loved, and would ſweetly ſink to reſt, conſcious of having extracted from the pleaſures of to-day a charm to mingle with the joys of to-morrow.

SECTION VIII.

Concluſion.

LET us not however, dream of miracles; nor conclude, from the virtues of individuals, that the manners

manners of the age are pure, or the characters of women in general reſpectable. Among a people where the ſpirit of ſociety is carried ſo far, as it is at preſent both in France and in England, the domeſtic life muſt be little known. All the ſentiments of nature, which ſpring up in retirement, and which are nurſed in ſolitude, muſt be weakened. The women muſt therefore be leſs devoted to their original and moſt important duties; they muſt be leſs wives and mothers.

The manners now direct the prejudices, as much as the prejudices formerly directed the manners. The ſacred attachments of love and friendſhip are exploded; they are baniſhed

baniſhed to the ſhepherd and the ſavage. Why?—Becauſe they are unpolite: they ſhew too great a preference; they pay to one, what is due to all.

The more the general tie extends, the more the particular ties are relaxed. We ſeem to be attached to all the world, and we are attached to nobody. Hence the increaſe of diſſimulation and falſhood. The leſs we feel, the more we appear to feel.

By a ſtrange contraſt, we are enraptured at the word *ſentiment*;—and all genuine ſentiment is ridiculed. Perhaps we imagine, what we do not feel, does not exiſt; and, indeed, we ſufficiently vindicate

dicate ourſelves from the imputation of real ſentiment, by the artful declamation which we ſubſtitute in its place.

The word *romantic* was never ſo much in uſe. This happy term affords a double feaſt to vanity: it excuſes eſteem, or juſtifies contempt, to the virtues which we want; and it prevents ſhame for the vices or the weakneſſes which we have. It makes us content with our knowledge: we believe that we have eſtimated all things; and that we ſee both what man is, and what he can be.

We talk a great deal about pleaſure, and we taſte very little. The ſoul precipitates itſelf upon its ob-

jects, when it ſhould keep them at a certain diſtance; deſire is gratified, before it can awake the divinity of paſſion; the ſpell which enchanted the mind is too ſoon broke. Imagination turns cold, becauſe it has nothing to create; illuſion vaniſhes; ſenſe grows dead. But what is ſenſe, without paſſion and fancy?

The void which we experience, in conſequence of falſe pleaſure, and the want of energy in the ſoul, muſt have given birth to *amuſement*, the reſource of cold hearts and empty heads; a word which is become important, and which muſt be ridiculous to the ſerious every time they uſe it; a word which implies what has no connection with

with virtue, and none perhaps with the ſenſes.

That amuſement, that inexpreſſible ſomething, which is neither imagination, reaſon, nor paſſion, and which conſiſts principally in forms, being the univerſal taſte, all things muſt comply with it. The accompliſhments are ſuppoſed virtues, and the vices are pardoned. Almoſt nobody has the boldneſs to cenſure guilt, when it wears the habit of the Graces. The mind is contracted; the heart is ſhut; and attention is buſied about trifles. To pleaſe or to diſpleaſe are become the great words of language.

As we are continually under obſervation, ſelf-love, by being

more rouſed, muſt be more keen; but the ſame ſpirit which rouſes it, likewiſe reſtrains it. It is curbed, and it is ſtimulated; its ſecret is rather veiled than hid, — and yet is ſecure. The eyes of vanity are obſcured by a miſt, and the mutual feeling is willing to ſeem blind. Society is a fencing ſchool, or field of combat, where ſelf-love encounters ſelf-love, and where each are deſirous to conquer without the air of emulation: they diſguiſe their efforts, that their pretenſions may not be ſuſpected.

From this aſſemblage of folly, vanity, and falſhood, muſt ſpring a reſtleſs levity in the commerce of the ſexes, and a ſerious and buſy mockery of paſſion. But what above

above all characteriſes the manners of the preſent age is the madneſs of ſhew; the frenzy of ſacrificing every thing to appearance; the importance aſſigned to little duties, and the value ſet upon little objects. We talk gravely of the trifles of to-day, and of thoſe of to-morrow. The ſoul has a languid, and never ſatisfied activity, which expands it over a thouſand objects without intereſting it in one, and which communicates motion without impulſe.

But if a taſte for letters, and a delirium of talents, mingle with the giddineſs of ſociety, from ſuch a combination muſt reſult other effects. Then a general paſſion of appearing informed muſt prevail, without the time, or the

trouble to be ſo; then we muſt ſee a torrent of ſuperficial knowledge, and a crowd of half-learned pretenders to ſcience; a multitude of philoſophical ideas, which men of genius throw out in retirement, and which are greedily ſeized by people of faſhion, diſputed, repeated, and ſcattered in polite circles; light converſations on profound ſubjects; the laws of genius ſettled, and a genius of memory, when we have nothing original; the eſtabliſhment and the oppoſition of literary ſocieties; pretenſions of all kinds, and of all denominations; bold pretenſions, cool and high pretenſions, and cautious pretenſions, with a mixture of reſerve; the fury of reputation, oftener uſurped than real; intrigue,

flattery,

flattery, and little arts to obtain it; in ſhort, the art of praiſing, to be praiſed; the art of joining foreign merit to our own, and of procuring renown either by ourſelves or by others.

As the general ſyſtem of luminaries is greater, and as they communicate their influence more fully by motion, the women, without giving themſelves any trouble, muſt be more enlightened. But, faithful to their plan, they only covet knowledge as an ornament to the mind, as jewels are to the perſon. They ſtudy the arts rather from a deſire to pleaſe, than a deſire to know, or from the pleaſure of learning; and they read more for amuſement, than for inſtruction.

Beſides, in a ſtate of ſociety where the motion is rapid, and where there is an eternal ſucceſſion of objects and ideas, the women, conſtantly occupied in following the ſcene, which changes and flies inceſſantly round them, muſt know better the ideas of the preſent, than of paſt times, and thoſe which are faſhionable than thoſe which are juſt. They muſt therefore be better acquainted with the language of the arts than with their principles, and have more unconnected ideas than uſeful or ſyſtematic knowledge.

It might perhaps be thought curious now to examine, what muſt be the conſequence of ſuch a mixture of ideas and manners, of levity

vity and learning, of philoſophy in the head and libertiniſm in the heart: that however is too ſelf-evident to afford room for much diſquiſition. It might likewiſe perhaps be thought curious, to compare the characters of women, as they at preſent exiſt in London, and in Paris, with thoſe which they have had in different periods, and which they now have in different countries; with their ſweet modeſty in many parts of England; with their timid reſerve in Scotland; with their tameneſs and want of paſſion in Holland; with their mixture of devotion and ſenſuality in Italy; with their warm imagination and keen ſenſibility in Spain; with their profound retirement in China,

where

where they have been ſeparated during four thouſand years from the intercourſe of men; in ſhort, with the character and the manners which muſt reſult from their confinement in Turky, in Perſia, and over almoſt all Aſia, where they only exiſt for one man; where they can neither cultivate their character nor their reaſon; and, deſtined to have only ſenſes, where they are forced by the abſurdity of their condition to join modeſty to wantonneſs, and coquetry to retirement:—But, to complete ſuch a parallel, it is ſufficient to have hinted it.

I ſhall therefore only obſerve, that in the preſent age there are fewer panegyrics on women than

in

in any former period. The poets ſeem to have loſt that delicate gallantry which was ſo long their character. They are either Cynics or voluptuaries. The prevailing taſte for women, indeed, which is neither love, nor paſſion, nor even gallantry, but the cold and barren effect of a habit of ſenſuality, can neither rouſe imagination nor ſentiment. In our numerous and growing aſſemblies, in the eternal round of diſſipation and amuſement, where the ſexes mingle with freedom, we learn to admire leſs, becauſe we learn to be more ſevere. Self-love, judge and rival, ſometimes indulgent through pride, but always cruel from jealouſy, was never more vigilant in ſpying faults, or ſowing ridicule. Praiſe is the

reſult

reſult of enthuſiaſtic paſſion; and never was there an age in which there was leſs than in this, though perhaps we affect more than our predeceſſors. Enthuſiaſm ſprings from a warm imagination, which creates objects in place of ſeeing them, and which heightens what it has ſeen. At preſent we ſee too much; in conſequence of which we feel too little. Beauty obtrudes itſelf on the view: its ſpots are too viſible; paſſion is diſguſted; and fancy ſickens for want of exerciſe. Female delicacy is loſt. Vice is ranked in the number of our accompliſhments. The leſs we eſteem the women, the more we pretend to know them:—and they at preſent make ſuch a language neceſſary. Every boy has more pride than to ſeem acquainted only with

with their virtues; and would-be rakes, whoſe experience really reaches no further, that they may ſupport a reputation with the ſex, accuſe them of more than human weakneſs, by contemptibly aſſuming a knowledge and a character to which they have no right.

Such, with regard to women, is the influence of that general ſpirit of ſociety which they have inſpired, and of which they do not fail to boaſt. They are like eaſtern monarchs, who are never more honoured then when they are leaſt ſeen: by diſcovering themſelves too freely to their ſubjects, they have encouraged them to revolt.

But, leſt the ladies ſhould take offence at being compared to tyrants,

rants, I will give them a gentler ſimile; which I ſhall introduce with a ſhort analyſis of female ſociety, as it progreſſes in countries where the ſoft affections exerciſe their ſweeteſt influence. — In a ſtate of nature, the company of women is little deſired; their beauties are unveiled to every eye; and their favours are beſtowed without courting. In the early periods of ſociety, they are principally valued on account of their utility; their condition approaches to ſervitude; and little delicacy is obſerved in the commerce of love. As ſociety advances, they are prized as objects of pleaſure: conſcious of their importance, they become more delicate of their beauties, reſerved in their manner, and nice of their favours. Love grows

jealous,

jealous, and beauty undergoes a degree of reſtraint. But as the mind opens, and when ſociety is better underſtood, ſuch reſtraint is thought unjuſt — ungenerous to the partners of our deareſt intereſts, our ſweeteſt pleaſures!—and inconſiſtent with that confidence which is due to love, to virtue, to mankind, and which is eſſential to our own peace. The freedom of nature is reſtored, within the pale of ſociety. Beauty becomes more brilliant, more alluring,—but leſs engaging. Man ceaſes to adore what is familiar to his eye. Like her emblematic flower, the ſame ſun that beholds the glory of woman may be ſaid to be witneſs to her diſgrace: her nature is too delicate to ſupport the beams of general admiration; ſhe opens her

attractions

attractions too fully to the heart; ſhe yields too freely her ſweetneſs to the breath of praiſe; and, if ſhe does not ſink into her original neglect, ſhe experiences a fate little more to be envied; ſhe is rudely pluckt by every ſpoiler; and, when her virtues are evaporated, the pride of creation is viewed with contempt.

I ſhall therefore conclude with adviſing the gentle ſex, to leave a remnant of authority in the hands of the men, and to keep a little reſerve in their own; as the beſt means of ſecuring the hearts of thoſe they love, and the eſteem of ſuch as deſerve it.

FINIS.

22 JY 69

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